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ABSTRACT

This booklet takes a critical look at some of the assumptions that "newer is better" when it comes to school buildings and considers what is actually lost each time an older neighborhood school is razed or retired. The following six assumptions are examined relative to their accuracy in the real world: 1) that "old" means out of dated or obsolete; 2) that in the long run it is a better investment of funds to construct a new building than to renovate an older one; 3) that older school buildings fail to meet national guidelines for school facilities; 4) that older school buildings have numerous practical drawbacks that cannot be realistically overcome; 5) that a new school will be a source of pride and affirmation for students and teachers; and 6) that a new school building will be an asset to its community and region. Decision making to close a school and getting the community involved prior to that decision are discussed. Several success stories involving school preservation are provided as is a list of national, state, and local organizations for more information. (GR)

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by Kerri Kubman

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A Community Guide to Saving Older Schools

by Kerri Rubman

Is a new school building always better than an older one? Some people seem to think so.

Parents who want the best for their children are likely to equate "best" with "newest." Teachers and school administrators, frustrated by having to meet high standards under trying working conditions, may see a large, new building as a way to solve diverse, and even unrelated, problems. Their goal is to educate children, not preserve older buildings.

School boards and local governments want to demonstrate that they are meeting their responsibilities. A shiny new school building proclaims that they are doing their jobs.

School facilities planners rely on national guidelines that currently suggest that bigger is better, and that it takes a new building and a large site to include all the features a "modern" school should have. And so, throughout the U.S., the policies and practices of state and local governments routinely encourage and reward construction of new schools, rather than maintenance and renovation of older ones.

When school districts advertise for and hire architects, they tend to engage those professionals who know a lot more about designing new buildings than renovating older ones. After all, not all architects have training or experience in the subspecialty of historic rehabilitation. But all have been taught how to plan a new structure that meets a list of client specifications and applies standardized formulas.

The general public, not fully informed about the alternatives, may tend to agree with this preference for building a new school rather than fixing up the old one. Talk of constructing a new building usually generates more interest and excitement than talk about replacing the mechanical systems, reconfiguring spaces, and doing repairs and refurbishing in the existing one. That's why it's often easier to pass a bond issue for new construction than for renovation. Even parents and community members who really like the neighborhood school may simply feel resigned or powerless once the school district has decided to close it.

Do students benefit from attending older neighborhood schools? As the case studies in this booklet illustrate, the advantage to children and the surrounding community can be significant.

For students, it can mean spending their days in unusually welcoming or beautiful places that encourage learning and positive interactions. Older schools may offer comfortable classrooms with natural light and breezes pouring in from large windows, and with pleasant surprises—like a reading nook, a stage, or a fireplace. Or they may be grand buildings with finely decorated entryways, libraries, and auditoriums—all proclaiming to students and to the community the importance of what takes place there. Attending school in an older building can provide students with constant, subtle lessons about their place in community history, and about respect for the past, appreciation of fine architecture and craftsmanship, and wise use of material resources. When students can walk to school, rather than having to rely on bus rides or lifts, it encourages them to participate more fully in school activities and to develop a greater sense of connection to their own neighborhoods.

Closing the neighborhood school often has an impact on other concerns faced by community members: the safety and stability of neighborhoods; the spread of sprawl development; the breakdown of social networks; wasteful government spending; lack of sound environmental planning.

The time has come to look more critically at the assumption that "newer is better" when it comes to school buildings. It is also time to consider what is being lost each time an older neighborhood school is razed or retired.

Newer Is Better? A Reality Check

Assumption:
"Old" means out of date, or even obsolete.

Reality:
It's not age that undermines an older school building—it's lack of care. Even relatively new schools that do not receive the regular maintenance they need—from painting and patching to periodic upgrading of materials and systems—will age in a hurry. Of course, the longer these tasks have been neglected, the more costly the repairs. Poor quality additions or "improvements" also lead to the perception that the original building has unfixable flaws.

Cover: The 1923 Elroy School, in Brentwood, Pa., has been renovated and kept in use, thanks to a campaign by local activists. *See page 15.*

— Photo courtesy of Ron Vochum

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A National Issue

- According to the U.S. General Accounting Office, one-third of all public schools, serving 14 million students, need extensive repair. Most substandard schools are in the western United States and in central cities, with largely minority and poor student populations.

- A major capital investment will be needed to upgrade the nation's school facilities. According to a May 2000 report from the National Education Association, it will take $322 billion to repair and modernize America's schools and provide them with adequate technology.

- The average public school in America is 42 years old. Twenty-eight percent of the public schools in America are more than 50 years old. Forty-six percent lack the electrical and communications wiring to support today's computer systems.

- Many school districts opt to abandon or raze existing school buildings and construct new facilities rather than renovate and modernize their facilities. Beginning in 1997, for the first time since 1982, school districts are spending more funds erecting new schools than upgrading or expanding existing school buildings. In 1998 nearly four times the amount (nearly $12 billion versus $3.7 billion) was spent on new construction and additions as opposed to renovating existing resources.

- According to the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities (NCEF), about 14.1 percent of the operating budgets of local school districts was devoted to maintenance in 1920, but only about 4 percent by 1990.

- Congress is aware of the pressing need to invest in public school facilities. Some federal programs currently provide financing assistance to help schools in high poverty areas make structural improvements and upgrades for computer technology. Several major bills are now pending that would expand these programs and offer others designed to assist school districts with their facilities.

Why do school districts fail to keep their older buildings in good repair? Not surprisingly, it all comes down to money. Year after year, school districts divert money from maintenance to pay for other pressing needs—books and supplies; computers and special equipment; teachers' salaries; leasing of temporary classrooms to alleviate overcrowding; covering the costs of developing new programs (especially those mandated by state or federal legislation). Particularly when there is an anti-tax sentiment among policy makers and voters, school districts have no choice but to find ways to keep their spending down—and so building maintenance gets postponed.

Furthermore, some state and local policies actually work to encourage this neglect. The policy of New York, described in a 1998 report by the state comptroller, is typical of many states: "There is a built-in fiscal incentive for school districts to avoid prudent maintenance expenditures, and instead let physical structures deteriorate until replacement is the only real option. State aid reimbursement is provided explicitly for capital expenditures at a generous rate, whereas it is not for routine maintenance."

Yet when older schools are properly maintained and upgraded as needed, they can continue to serve their communities well. When school districts take proper care of their building stock, it demonstrates that they are making wise use of public money and providing good stewardship of the public's resources.

Assumption:
In the long run, it is a better investment of funds to construct a new building than to renovate an older one.

Reality:
It almost always costs more initially to construct an entirely new building than to renovate the deteriorated portions of older ones. School officials and others assume, however, that the new building is a better long-term investment, offering more modern features, cheaper and easier maintenance, and a longer projected life span.

To get a fair comparison of the costs of new construction versus rehabilitation, many factors must be considered.

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According to architect Larry D. Williams, a project manger with the Denver public school system, with 25 years of experience in the design and construction of educational facilities: "Everything you do, mechanically or electrically, or any other way in an existing building is going to cost you more than in new construction. But the big advantage you have with an existing building is that the building is already there." He explains that 20 to 25 percent of the cost of new construction is for the building shell. But if an older building is structurally sound and usable, that's 20 to 25 percent of the construction cost saved.

In addition to the known costs for designing and constructing a new building, there may be hidden costs that don't enter into discussions. For example, if the new school will be built on an undeveloped site, there will be added costs to purchase and develop the land and to build roads, sewer lines, and other infrastructure. It may also cost more to bus students out to the new location. In Maine, for example, the number of school-age children fell by 27,000 between 1970 and 1995, but state and local busing costs rose from $8.7 million to $54 million during that period. That's because more children had to be bussed to new schools in more distant locations (from "The Cost of Sprawl," a report by the Maine State Planning Office, 1997).

If the old school is scheduled to come down, there will be costs to demolish it (usually 4 to 5 percent of the overall replacement costs). If the old school will be left vacant, the school district will have to pay for basic stabilization, maintenance, and security.

On the other hand, there are ways to find cost savings and benefits when doing renovations. Good planning and project management can make a big difference in the final cost. For example, project managers engaged in a major renovation project of more than 500 Chicago public schools found that historically accurate replacement materials, or at least good substitutes, were not always as costly as they expected. One project manager planned to replace an ornate copper cornice with aluminum, but received bids on both materials. Surprisingly, the more costly, more durable copper turned out to be cheaper to install.

It's not age that undermines an older school building—it's lack of care.

While the funding policies of many states strongly favor constructing a new building rather than maintaining and improving an older one, more and more states are reconsidering and rewriting these policies. In addition, in some states—including Georgia, Florida, and Colorado—school buildings that qualify for state, local, or national historic designations may be eligible for preservation grants and other special financial help.

The federal government currently provides aid for school repairs and renovations through Qualified Zone Academy Bonds (QZAB). QZABs were created in 1997 to assist with school renovations in high poverty areas such as Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities or schools with 35 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. Generally, the federal government covers all the interest on these bonds (by issuing tax credits, rather than interest payments, to the bond holders), so the schools pay back principal only. That enables them to save up to 50 percent of the cost of major repair or renovation projects. At least 21 states are currently using, or in the process of applying for, QZABs. This program may be expanded in the future, and other federal programs to aid older school buildings are likely to follow. For more information, see the website of the U.S. Department of Education:www.ed.gov/inits/construction/qzab.html.

Finally, creative financing arrangements may help. "Performance contracting" is one innovative option. In this legally binding arrangement, a private company agrees to retrofit an older building with more energy-efficient systems for heating, air conditioning, lighting, water and sewer systems, or building controls. The company then takes its payment over several years as the building owners realize reduced energy costs.

And a recent study reports that in 1996 the Denver public schools initiated a sale-lease back program: "Under this plan, the district sells certain property it owns to a nonprofit corporation which exists solely to facilitate the district's lease-purchase transaction. The district then leases that property back under an annually terminable agreement. Money raised from the sale is used to improve the leased property, as well as other property the district owns. The investor gets principal and interest payments." (Source: "Finance: Making Decisions About Funding School Facilities," Education Commission of the States, 2000. On ECS website: www.ecs.org.)

Assumption:
Older school buildings fail to meet national guidelines for school facilities.

Reality:
Standards for school facilities are set by the education agency of each state, not by any federal agency. But state agencies will often rely on national sources, including those from the private sector, to help them develop their own regulations.

The Council of Educational Facilities Planners, International (CEFPI), a nonprofit membership organization in Scottsdale, Ariz., has emerged as the main national source of information on school planning. In publications such as its popular *Guide for Planning Educational Facilities*, the group specifies what it considers to be the ideal learning environment for elementary, middle, and secondary schools, regarding enrollment numbers, building and lot size, classroom size, and floor plans.

CEFPI began compiling information on school planning in the 1930s, after its founding in 1921 as the National Council on School House Construction. Its guidelines, derived from research on space utilization as well as the experiences of its members, were first published in 1953 and have been revised seven times since then, most recently in 1991. Many state education agencies now use these guidelines as the basis for their own regulations on school facilities. And local school districts look to the guidelines in developing their plans.

It must be noted that the development and increasingly widespread use of the CEFPI guidelines coincides with a boom in new school construction, especially in the Southwest where CEFPI is headquartered. Allies of older schools find that the guidelines are far better suited for the design and construction of new buildings than for the renovation of older ones. For example, according to CEFPI's guidelines, a high school should have 30 acres of land plus one additional acre for every 100 students. That means that a school with 1,000 students would require 40 acres. But there are tens of thousands of schools across the country—especially in urban and suburban areas—that can't possibly meet these guidelines and yet have proven track-records of serving students' educational needs well.

Standards for school facilities are set by the education agency of each state, not by any federal agency.

CEFPI recognizes this problem. According to Tom Kube, the executive director: "Some states require their school districts to use the space and land utilization guidelines in our guide. But in some urban areas they can't because they can't meet the acreage requirements. So we're looking at how we can modify those for urban areas where the acreage isn't available."

While it is wise for state agencies to take CEFPI recommendations into account when drafting state regulations, they may do a disservice to citizens when they turn these recommendations into rigid requirements. Just as CEFPI is in the process of modifying its own guidelines to be more sympathetic to schools in urban settings, so state education agencies and local school districts should be prepared to exercise judgment and common sense to adapt or modify their own requirements on a case-by-case basis.

Assumption:
Older school buildings have numerous practical drawbacks that cannot be realistically overcome, such as those involving...

Code compliance: Older buildings may not meet current federal or state standards for building and fire safety; seismic safety; removal or management of hazards such as asbestos or lead paint; or compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Changing technology needs: To give students access to advanced technology, today's school buildings must have adequate power sources, wiring and cables, and the "head room" (centralized management location) to support computer networks, internet and cable television access, and security systems.

Changing educational practices that require more varied and flexible spaces than are usually found in older buildings. These include "school-within-a-school" programs; team-teaching that calls for larger classrooms; special education classes and tutorials that call for smaller ones; or more and better science labs, computer centers, and other spaces for hands-on or individualized learning.

Desire for features that will improve energy efficiency and ease maintenance. Examples include such items as more advanced heating and air conditioning systems, or double-glazed windows with easy-care aluminum frames.

Desire for other enhancements and improvements, such as a full-service cafeteria, athletic center and expanded playing fields, or more parking spaces.

Reality:

Again and again, preservation-savvy architects, building engineers, product suppliers, and others have demonstrated how many of these practical problems can be solved through well-planned renovations, additions, or code variances.

Larry D. Williams, architect with the Denver Public Schools, states: "We can replace mechanical and electrical systems. We can go into a building and tear everything out and put new construction in. We can repair or upgrade or replace the deteriorated elements of the building and we can upgrade the utilities that are just not up to current standards, such as ventilation and electrical services and technology wiring. New systems can be applied to existing buildings without very much trouble."

Architects James A. Beaudin and Jeffrey A. Sells concur in their article "Hidden Opportunities" (*American School & University*, August 1998): "It is easy to paint walls, fix ceilings, add new lighting—essentially making old spaces look new. However, it is the not-so-obvious opportunities that result from strategic decisions to preserve, enhance and transform, which provide the greatest benefits of renovation... [R]enovation often can result in dramatic, inspiring spaces that might not be economically feasible in new construction."

When necessary, existing spaces above ceilings, behind walls, or below floors can be accessed to make room to run new wiring, pipes, or ductwork. Some existing materials can be replaced or covered over by fire-resistive ones to improve fire ratings. Or code variances can be worked out. For example, the addition of a building sprinkler system might increase the fire rating of the building so that it will comply with current codes.

A well-designed addition can not only expand building capacity, and add desired new features, but also correct deficiencies. For example, the addition might include new stairwells placed at the end of existing dead-end corridors to meet exiting requirements, plus entrance ramps, elevators, and toilet rooms that are ADA compliant.

And so on.

The point is many practical problems may also have practical solutions. Unfortunately, school districts may not seek out design professionals with the experience and expertise needed to develop these solutions.

Additionally, it should be noted that the advanced technology cited as the enemy of older buildings can also be a friend. Advanced technology is, almost by definition, technology that will keep advancing. For example with improvements in wireless connections for LANs and the internet, wiring may no longer be the concern it is right now. In Chicago public schools, for example, computer networking, internet access, and security systems are all managed with wireless connections. In our environment of rapid change, some of today's technical problems could be solved by next year—or even next week.

Assumption:
A new school will be a source of pride and affirmation for students and teachers.

Reality:

Students and teachers certainly will benefit from an improved educational environment that is more attractive and functional than an inefficient, deteriorating one. But that is so whether the improvements come from construction of a new building or renovation of an older one.

But continued use of an existing building may offer something that a new building cannot—an ongoing tradition that connects students and others to the community's past. Students at a new school start writing that school's story from scratch. Students in an older building join in a continuing story that can enrich their experience in subtle but significant ways.

They're sure to know which famous or influential people once attended "their" school—from pro athletes and movie stars to business moguls and government leaders. These "local heroes" may even return to the school from time to time to show

As part of a five-year, $2.5 billion effort to improve all Chicago public schools, the once abandoned John B. Drake School (above) was renovated to become an eighth-grade Transition Center. The 1907 George S. Pullman School (below), a National Register building, received a $3.1 million exterior restoration that included precise color-matching of the century old mortar and restoration of the 336 wood frame windows. ***See page 2.***

— Photos by Anthony Way Photography, courtesy of Bauer Latoza Studio

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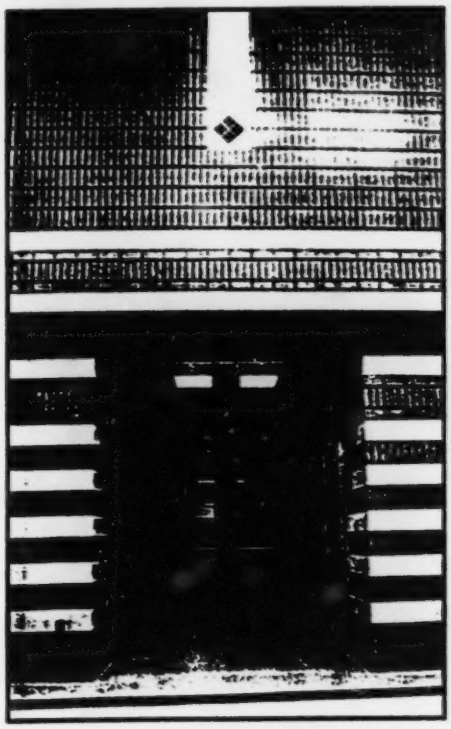
Turning a Disadvantage into an Advantage



— Photo courtesy of David C. Edwards, Edwards & Edwards Architects

Schools are in use nine months out of the year. And most construction projects obviously can't be completed during the three summer months. Scheduling a school renovation project can be tricky. During a school renovation project in Boston for example, contractors had to work from 3:00 to 11:00 p.m. and use special equipment to keep the brick dust down.

Some schools have come up with other creative solutions to handle the disruption. When the St. Dominic School in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, undertook a yearlong renovation/addition project while the K-8 school continued in use, the architect and administrators turned the disruption into a learning experience. Students and staff were kept informed of all the details, and took part in special events such as a kick-off ceremony, pizza lunch with the workers, lay-a-brick day, and a wind-up bar-b-q. Ongoing activities included "student foreman of the week;" supervised tours of work in progress; creation of a tile mural by students, staff, and others; and production of a video by the visual arts class. Architect David C. Edwards recalls: "For many of the staff and students, this would be truly a once in a lifetime opportunity to experience and participate in a major construction project...Normal construction happenings, such as pouring a floor slab and raising the roof, became special events and landmark days...This school existed and came together in the hearts and minds of those that participated and will continue to exist as a common bond long after everyone has gone their separate ways in the world." (Source: "Turning a Disadvantage into an Advantage," David C. Edwards, *CEFPI Educational Facilities Planner*, Vol. 31, no. 1, Jan.-Feb. 1993.)

their appreciation and support.

Sometimes the school itself boasts a proud history. For example, many of the schools that served African-Americans before desegregation played a vital role in their neighborhoods as political and social gathering points and as the training grounds for future leaders.

And in many cases, the school building itself may be significant, representing a fine architectural achievement or an appealing style that would not, or could not, be produced today.

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Assumption:
A new school building will be an asset to its community and region.

Reality:
Existing schools *already* serve valuable functions in their communities—and can do so even better if they are regularly maintained and improved.

The older school often serves as a community anchor and landmark. It is a prominent social and civic gathering place—not only for students and school employees, but also for parents, neighbors, and other community members.

For students, it is a place to take part in interest clubs, athletics, one-on-one advice sessions with teachers or other concerned adults. Sometimes the school is the students' only source for vital services such as health care, psychological counseling, daycare, or regular meals. These offerings, plus countless daily interactions with peers and professionals, help give students a sense of belonging to a community, and the knowledge that people and resources exist to help them deal with problems.

And for parents and community members, the school is a center for civic life. It is the place to attend public meetings and to vote. It is the local emergency shelter. It is where parents and

others join together to organize and attend PTA activities, blood drives, community theater performances, athletic tournaments, and fund-raising holiday fairs. Kids of all ages and parents with young children take over playgrounds and athletic fields whenever they are not in formal use. Other adults head to the school building on evenings and weekends for interest classes in everything from Nature Photography to English as a Second Language to CPR.

Of course, living close to the neighborhood school makes all of this easier for children, parents, and others. Plus, when children can walk to school with their friends, past the homes of neighbors, it brings them not only comfort but a measure of safety. It's no wonder, then, that current and potential residents consider a "school in walking distance," or at least nearby, to be a highly desirable amenity, likely to stabilize and enhance their property values.

By contrast, when the neighborhood school is abandoned for a mega-school built on the outskirts of town, student involvement and community life can suffer. Constance Beaumont, director of state and local policy at the National Trust and a specialist on issues of sprawl development, sums up the problems:

> "The construction of new schools on 'sprawl sites'—i.e., isolated, peripheral sites not well-integrated into communities—can make it more difficult to build a sense of community. Moreover, such 'sprawl locations' often add to transportation costs that, in turn, put heavy financial pressures on families and governments alike. Because the sprawl sites are generally inaccessible except by car or bus, time-pressed parents must act as chauffeurs for their children, who can no longer walk to school. Teens from less wealthy families must often work long hours after school to pay for the cars now necessary for their independence. This, in turn, takes time away from homework and physical exercise."

These costs and drawbacks should be taken into account by decision makers.

Students who must race for the bus each afternoon have fewer opportunities for extracurricular activities and informal interactions that cement social bonds. Parents and others, especially those without cars, are also cut off from aspects of school and community life.

In the meantime, if the former "neighborhood" school has been abandoned, it can become a blight on its community. A vacant and neglected school building can quickly become a draw for vandals and trash; a hideout for criminal activities; or a dangerous attraction for curious young explorers. If the school is razed, there may be a gaping hole in the fabric of the neighborhood for years to come.

New Perspectives on Older Schools

Not every older school building can, realistically, be kept in continued use—but many can and should be! School officials will not be able to make decisions wisely until they can look past assumptions that "old" means flawed or substandard, and instead make informed decisions based on the merits and condition of each building.

To summarize, in many cases the problem with an older school building is not that it is old, but that it has been inadequately maintained and is under-appreciated. An older building that has been conscientiously maintained, or appropriately renovated, can continue to offer years of use to its community. Renovation of an existing building, rather than construction of a new one, may also be cost-effective—and it certainly demonstrates better stewardship of a community's existing resources.

What's more, older school buildings can offer aesthetic, practical, and community benefits that outweigh certain drawbacks. Students, teachers, school administrators, and community members can be educated to appreciate this and to take pride in having within their neighborhood a significant structure and useful public resource.

While older buildings may have some practical disadvantages, there are countless examples of communities across the country that have overcome these obstacles by employing creative problem-solving and expert help. Unfortunately, as long as state and local funding policies encourage construction of new buildings rather than appropriate maintenance and renovation of older ones, school districts will not be motivated to explore these solutions.

How Is the Decision Made to Close or to Keep an Older School?

The decision to close a school building or keep it open is almost always made at the local level by the local school board or education agency. And so, the decision-making process varies from place to place. But certain considerations almost always apply.

First of all, those who decide the fate of school buildings are not usually concerned about preserving historic resources. Their primary considerations center on

School Location and Urban Sprawl

The following information, from a report on school site selection in South Carolina, sounds a warning cry for communities throughout the nation:

There is strong reason to believe that the placement of schools contributes to urban sprawl, and there are at least five explanations for how new schools, regularly located at the edge of existing development, trigger this phenomenon. First, real estate developers who give the land to school districts to help sell houses often select school sites. These sites frequently are at distant locations, are undesirable for construction, and are oddly configured.

Second, often new schools introduce infrastructure to a rural or undeveloped area for the first time making it easy for residential and commercial development projects to follow. By placing the school there, infrastructure like water and sewer is provided to a location where it was not needed nor expected. The result is that otherwise rural land that would not have developed is transformed and suddenly desirable for development.

Third, new schools attract residents and thus can re-characterize an area; unexpected booms in development may occur in an area where a new school is located.

Fourth, a town can easily annex a school located on its outskirts, and this in turn can facilitate development of an area contiguous to the school that otherwise should not be urbanized. Under South Carolina law, a town can annex a school without much obstruction because schools have no assessed property value. Once a town annexes a school, it is then easy for a contiguous land owner—dissatisfied with restrictions on development that he may encounter from the county—to join the municipality. Thus, a landowner can attempt to circumvent rural development restrictions.

Finally, the design criteria of schools themselves contribute to sprawl. These criteria regularly include huge space requirements that force schools to go to the edge of town. Thus, schools are usually located in a way that perpetuate the sprawl model.

...The reason for these troubling trends is the disconnect between the school site selection process and land use planning considerations. School officials and planning agencies work independently of one another, and opportunities for the best school sites are often lost.

From "Wait for the Bus: How Low-country School Site Selection and Design Deter Walking to School and Contribute to Urban Sprawl." A Report Prepared for the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League. Christopher Kozm. Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy, Duke University, November 1999

whether or not the buildings can meet students' educational needs and do so in a way that is safe, cost-effective, and in adherence with state and national standards and community expectations.

School officials often rely on state and local studies for their long-term planning. For example, **demographic studies** forecast if school-age populations within specific areas will shrink or grow over time. School boards will also use these studies to see if they'll need to shift school boundaries or relocate facilities to achieve or maintain racial balance.

School facilities surveys, conducted periodically by school districts, are also used to plan which buildings should be retained and upgraded as needed, and which should be abandoned. These surveys, augmented with blueprints and other documents, describe the buildings' age and general condition, and rate factors such as space utilization; variety/quality of facilities; condition of structural materials such as windows, ceilings, floors, and roofs; and condition/adequacy of mechanical systems. Of course, older schools that have suffered years of neglect are more likely to come out poorly in these ratings.

Standards for building assessment surveys and methods for conducting them vary widely from state to state. Daniel Carey, director of the National Trust Southwest Regional Office notes: "The variety and complexity of 'report cards' for buildings is both astounding and disturbing." Surveys may be conducted by school architects and facilities engineers who are biased against saving older buildings, or by those with minimal professional expertise. Survey findings are often subjective. Information may be recorded on complex forms and in unwieldy formats that only specialists can access and understand. And so, "[t]he people who make decisions (school board officials, for example) either become so confused or are so blindly dependent on the insiders' recommendations that their decisions for making replacements are often a *fait accompli*."

State funding policies are also critical. As mentioned before, many states provide significant funding for new construction, less for renovations, and little or none for ongoing maintenance. Money talks. In these states, it often makes more financial sense for school districts to abandon an older building in favor of building a new one.

While all public school buildings must comply with federal standards for safety and accessibility, many states add further regulations and restrictions beyond the federal ones. Ordinarily, state education agencies will only provide funding to build or upgrade schools that meet the state standards. For example, some states will not provide aid for schools with wooden construction, or for multi-story buildings used for younger age groups. Other state regulations are derived from the guidelines proposed by the CEFPI (described earlier) or other national groups. When states turn these suggestions into their own inflexible requirements, that may doom otherwise viable school buildings.

How Can Community Members Get Involved?

While parents, community associations, and/or preservationists may come to the defense of a school after the decision has already been made to close it, they are rarely if ever consulted beforehand. In fact, school dis-

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tricts don't usually have a mechanism for seeking such input. Community members who want to have a greater voice in the process should get involved early—ideally well before a crisis erupts. While it is typical, and easier, to organize in support of a specific school, you may have an even greater impact by taking a districtwide approach.

Find out which local government bodies make the decisions about school closures in your district, what procedures they follow, and which state and local policies and guidelines affect their decisions. For example, it is important to know if your school district conducts regular facilities surveys, and how those are used in long-term planning. If one or several older schools have been tagged as "recommended for abandonment," there may still be plenty of time to build early community support and to counter the decision by submitting expert testimony from architects, engineers, or others experienced in working with older buildings. Even better, community members can press school boards to include preservationists and other qualified members of the public in the initial building tours and evaluation process.

Several preservation organizations have had success by conducting their own surveys of school buildings within their districts, prioritizing those buildings most worthy of protection, and advocating for such protection with local and state agencies.

Resources listed on page 30-31 can help community groups gather the kind of information they'll need to have a greater voice in school closure decisions. And the following "success stories" show what can be done.

Citizens Save Their Neighborhood Schools

Atchison Middle School, Atchison, Kans.

Atchison, Kans., a town of about 10,000 on the Missouri River with many 19th century homes, still offers small-town charm. But the character of the town is changing.

In 1994, the school district closed five older neighborhood elementary schools and began bussing students to a large, new consolidated school at the edge of town. A 1970s high school and a vocational-technical school are within a block of the new elementary school. Joan Adam recalls: "Some of us objected to building a new school at the time, but there was a well-managed campaign for it and the proposal was popular, so no real opposition took hold."

Then, starting around 1998, the local newspaper began mentioning the school board's long-term plans to abandon the Atchison Middle School (AMS) in town (originally built as a high school in 1908), turn the current high school into a middle school, and build a new high school in the same out-of-town area.

This time, citizens like Joan Adam were not going to just sit by and let it happen. Adam, chair of the Atchison Preservation Alliance and a member of the National Trust Board of Advisors, was one of those concerned about keeping the town's older buildings in use and its downtown vibrant. Others saw the proposal as too costly, inevitably leading to higher taxes, and financially irresponsible, especially while the town was still paying off its bonds for the elementary school and for a new jail.

A handful of citizens began meeting privately. They also made several presentations before the school board encouraging it to keep the current schools in their present use. But in October 1999, the school board proposed a $27 million bond issue, to go to a public vote in April, which was primarily devoted to building a new high school and renovating the current high school for use as a middle school.

The core group of citizens formed an organization called the 3Rs—Residents for Rational Renovation—to come out publicly against the proposal. In its first press release, the group explained that it had presented alternatives to new construction to the school board and now wanted to make that information available to the public.

Members of the group visited other schools that had been renovated successfully and issued more press releases describing these as useful models for Atchison. The group also applied for and received a $3,000 grant from the National Trust's Preservation Services Fund to hire an architect to study the feasibility of renovations over new construction.

From that point on, much of the battle between those for and against the bond issue took place in the media. Supporters of the

Five neighborhood elementary schools in Atchison, Kans., have already been replaced by a consolidated school. Closure of the Atchison Middle School, a prominent downtown building, would further hurt the community.

— Photo courtesy of Atchison Daily Globe

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school board "were very well organized and seemed to have a bottomless pit of money," Adam says. That faction organized as "Citizens for Kids." Representatives from both sides flooded the *Atchison Daily Globe* with letters to the editor and wrote opinion columns for its editorial page. The local radio station also hosted an on-air forum on the issue.

Adam adds: "We were fortunate that the newspaper handled the issue fairly. I would advise [others engaged in a similar conflict] to go to their local editors early on to talk about the issue, tell their side, and attempt to get the media's support, or at least a promise of fairness."

The 3Rs took every opportunity to challenge public statements by the opposition and to take advantage of its mistakes. For example, literature by Citizens for Kids claimed that the bond issue was modest, adding an average of less than $10 per month to property taxes. The 3Rs answered with data showing how this amount would burden senior citizens and others on fixed incomes, in a town where 43 percents of residents had annual household incomes of under $30,000.

Other examples: Supporters of the bond issue encouraged voters to approve it by telling them that the state would subsidize about one-third of the cost of new school construction. It was up to the 3Rs to point out that a similar state subsidy was available for renovations.

In addition, the newspaper had asked both groups to provide lists of their contributors and the amounts given. The 3Rs—which had mainly received donations of about $25 to $100 from local citizens—submitted this information right away. When Citizens for Kids balked, the 3Rs wrote a newspaper column questioning why. Could it be that the group was funded by people with a financial interest in the new construction, including people who did not pay taxes in Atchison?

The school board had regularly cited a previous study that claimed Atchison Middle School did not meet current fire safety and ADA standards, and that needed renovations would cost $8.454 million. But the new study the 3Rs commissioned found: "These issues can be resolved at little cost. Improvements would include a new elevator, enclosing the existing stairways with fire rated construction and creating areas of evacuation assistance." That report estimated that renovation of AMS and the high school would cost a total of $12.435 million ($6.635 million and $5.8 million respectively). The resulting newspaper article announced, "AMS rehab would save millions."

The 3Rs also reminded voters that the school board had made no plans for the future use of AMS, and that it had a poor track record of looking after its surplus buildings. Three of the five elementary schools abandoned for the new elementary school remained empty. When one of these was demolished during the campaign for the bond issue, it unleashed an emotional response from those who did not want to see another of the town's grand old school buildings razed or left to deteriorate.

In the final days before the election, yard signs sprung up around town for both sides. Unlike their opponents', the yard signs of the 3Rs were homemade, reinforcing the point that they were ordinary citizens fighting against a well-funded, well-organized block backed by the school system. Adam adds: "By this time we realized people wanted to be 'for' something rather than against, so we used on our signs and in our letters the slogan: 'For a better solution, vote no.'"

On Tuesday, April 4, 2000, some 3,500 people—53 percent of registered voters—showed up at the polls—a remarkable turnout considering that the bond issue was the only item on the ballot. The bond issue was defeated by an 85 percent vote!

The school board is now being encouraged to form a new committee to make plans to renovate the two schools, following the wishes of the electorate. Adam sees this as a chance to make a fundamental change in the way the school board does business: "This time, we want to have community-wide meetings and focus groups, so that the decisions will be made from the ground up, not from the top down as they were before."

"So it's far from over," she concludes, "but at least we won a good round."

George Watts Elementary School, Durham, N.C.

The following is adapted from the article "Renovating a Historic School for Continued School Use in North Carolina: A Community Challenge" by Jeff Caiola, which appeared in North Carolina Preservation *(no. 108, Summer 1998), a publication of Preservation North Carolina.*

Opened in 1919, the George Watts Elementary School is the oldest school building in Durham, N.C., still serving its original purpose. The school, now possibly in its best condition ever, readily provides a place of education to more than 500 students and continues to serve as an attractive and significant resource for its community. The rescue and rehabilitation of the George Watts

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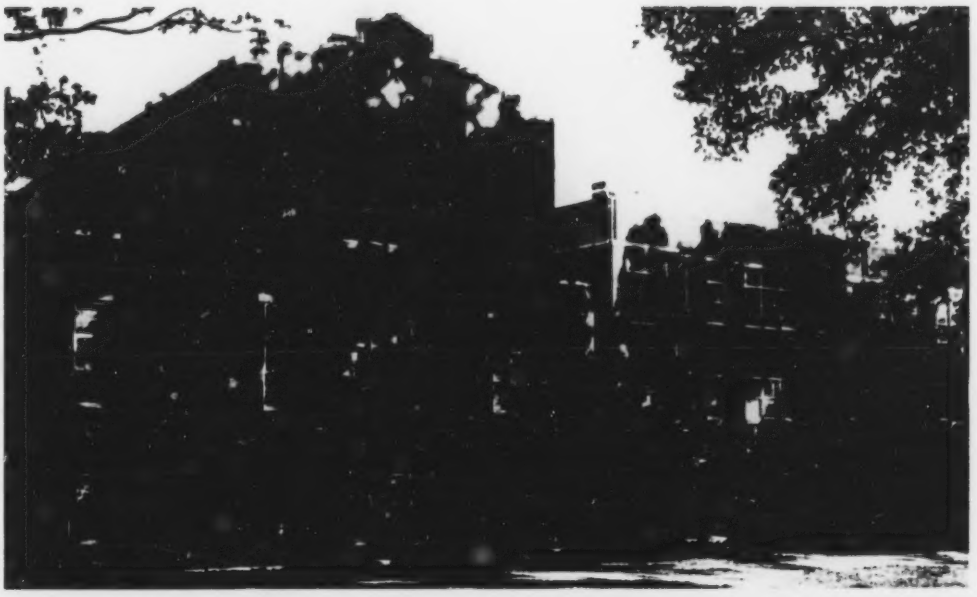
School from almost certain demolition are an inspiration to all communities faced with losing a community school.

When North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction (DPI) revealed its intention to close the school, the local community, which valued the building as a local landmark, organized to save it. To preserve the school, community members had to educate themselves on the policies and guidelines required in renovating/building a school, organize their resources and manpower, and demand that their view be heard. Throughout the process, the Watts School community had to continually offer innovative ideas and solutions to counter DPI's persistent demands that any renovations and new construction be done according to North Carolina Public Schools Facility Standards.

In a 1989 report to the Durham City Board of Education, DPI's opposition to renovating older urban schools was made very clear. The report concluded that there should be "discontinued use of this site for an elementary school" because it failed to meet the following state facility standards:

- Minimum enrollment for an elementary school is to be 450 students to offer the most efficient use of space and personnel at a reasonable cost per student. (At the time Watts enrolled 360 children.)
- Minimum size for elementary schools should be 10 acres plus 1 acre for every 100 children. (At the Watts School, with a minimum of 450 students, a minimum of 14.5 acres would be required. The existing school is on 3.99 acres.)
- The minimum recommended building area for an elementary school is 145 gross square feet per student. (Watts School, with a minimum of 450 students, would need a minimum of 65,250 gross square feet. Before the renovation, Watts had 35,130 gross square feet.)
- The Floor of Exit Discharge Issue concerns where in a building certain grade levels (and the extracurricular spaces they use most frequently) should be located so that children may be evacuated from a dangerous situation as efficiently and quickly as possible. For example, kindergartens and first grades should have classrooms and most extracurricular spaces on the first floor. (At the Watts School, the media center and computer room were located on the second floors; preferably they should have been on a first floor.)
- Handicapped access requires ramps and elevators in buildings two stories or taller. (At the Watts School, there were as many as four floors and no elevator or access ramp.)
- The size of a classroom and the facilities available within rooms are specified. (For example, suggested classroom size for 1-3 grades is 1,000-1,200 square feet; minimum ceiling heights are 10'-0"; and a wet instructional area is required. Watts School's classrooms were all too small, and many lacked additional features like a wet area.)
- The building must meet fire safety codes. (At the Watts School, most stairwells did not meet code, nor did most windows, doors, walls, or ceilings.)
- A sufficient number of parking spaces is required: one space per classroom and one space per administrative office. (If renovated, the Watts School would need additional parking.)
- Kindergartens should have a separate play area, preferably fenced in. (At the Watts School the kindergartens did not have a separate play area.)

Local school boards commonly maintain that they are compelled to replace older urban schools that do not meet DPI standards. These guidelines make it nearly



A compatible addition, designed by Durham architect G. Edward Belk, brought needed improvements to the 1919 George Watts Elementary School.

— Photo courtesy of G. Edwin Belk/AIA and The Roberts Group

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impossible for any urban school to comply. However, local communities and even local school boards often overlook the fact that the guidelines are just that—guidelines that are not binding on local boards. The recognition by the Watts School community that ultimate power rested with Durham City Board of Education became a key factor in the school being saved and renovated.

With a strong sense of purpose, the community organized a game plan to persuade the school board to save the school. The community led the campaign to pass a school bond referendum in 1991, which would earmark $2.9 million for the renovation of the George Watts School. After it passed, the board began a feasibility study on ways to keep the school building in use.

In April 1992, the school board approved a proposal from parents, teachers, and neighborhood representatives to establish a committee to review school renovation options. In less than a month, the committee utilized the expertise within their local community (architects, engineers, writers, and others) to develop new figures and plans for the school.

The school board's feasibility study was completed just two weeks prior to the committee findings, and it estimated the cost at $4.3 million to renovate the school for 300 students. The committee findings projected the renovation to cost $3.6 million for an expanded school accommodating 400 students. The committee's estimated cost of $65 per square foot was less than the $99 per square foot proposed by school board's consultant or the $120 per square foot that the state had proposed to build a new school.

In the end, the Durham City Board of Education received and accepted a bid of $4 million to renovate and expand the existing building to accommodate 450 students. Under the guidance of a consulting architect hired for his expertise and experience in working with historic buildings, the architects developed innovative renovations and an architecturally attractive and functional addition to bring the school in line with state guidelines.

The new addition increased the gross square footage to 66,130 (above the required minimum: 65,250) to accommodate a total of 450 students—DPI's minimum enrollment for an elementary school. The addition included a media center and computer rooms. A new handicapped ramp was located in front of the addition to provide first-floor exit discharge—despite the fact that the ramp was attached to the "second story." An elevator was installed in the new addition that had access to all floors. (This plan was accepted by DPI's Division on School Planning.) Because of the creative design of the addition, the playground area, which was already smaller than DPI's regulations, was only minimally reduced. More parking was added outside.

In the existing building, classroom size was enlarged by shrinking the hallways and consolidating existing classrooms to make larger rooms. Existing walls were stripped down to the brick to waterproof and fireproof. New windows, doors, and ceilings, all in compliance with current fire safety regulations, were installed. Bathrooms, wet areas, and teacher rooms were added to classrooms to meet facility standards. The exits on the rear of the school were lowered by half a floor to give the school first floor exit discharge in the rear.

With the demolition of a boiler room in the rear of the original building (replaced by a new boiler room in the addition), the original undersized, ill-equipped cafeteria could be expanded in the rear and a loading dock added. A fenced-in separate play area was also constructed for kindergartners in this newly opened area.

The building contained just a small amount of asbestos, so the cost of removal was only $10,000. (Of course, proper asbestos removal would have been necessary even if the building had been demolished.)

And so, through perseverance, ingenuity, and community-wide effort, the George Watts Elementary School was saved. Despite skepticism from DPI, all the work was completed at a price equivalent to or cheaper than building a comparable new school. The Watts School project now sets a precedent for other communities that need to challenge state facilities standards in order to save their neighborhood school.

Citywide Effort Uses Students as Advocates

Denver Public Schools Historic Preservation Project

The following is an abbreviated version of the presentation given by Sarah McCarthy at the 1999 National Preservation Conference in Washington, D.C. McCarthy serves as preservation consultant for Colorado Preservation, Inc., and director of its All Schools Colorado Program.

I am here to tell you that Colorado preservationists are learning that saving public schools as schools can make sense: aesthetically, educationally, and economically.

In 1991, the citizens of Denver passed a bond package for renovations and additions to existing schools. But in the first six months, four schools were slated

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for demolition that the school board, conveniently, had never mentioned in its propaganda. The neighbors around those schools came to preservation organizations and said, "Can you help? We don't want to lose these beautiful, old schools."

The preservation community approached the school district and said, "You own a number of very wonderful schools—architecturally and historically significant buildings—and we would like to work with you to preserve some of your most significant buildings. Would you be willing to work with us?" And to our surprise and extreme pleasure, they said, "Yes, we would love your input. We don't know which of our buildings are significant and we don't have the money to focus or save every school."

And so began our process along two paths. One was the crisis mode for the four schools that were slated for demolition. [Ultimately two were demolished but two others were saved. One building continued to be used as a public school, and the other, after receiving historic designation, was sold and converted to condominiums.]

At the same time, we developed an ongoing process to protect Denver's older school buildings. We asked: How are we going to save as many schools as possible? How are we going to involve the students? How are we going to establish an ongoing relationship between the preservation community and the school district?

The first thing that was done was to form a task force of stakeholders. The task force included members of neighborhood organizations, the school board, the PTA, the city's planning office, the mayor's office, the city council, the landmark commission, and the American Institute of Architects, as well as representa-

Recommendations from "All Schools Colorado"

1. **Bring to the table the largest and broadest group of stakeholders that you can identify.** Don't forget the people in the buildings and grounds crews and the office secretaries within the school district, neighborhood associations, local preservationists and activists, as well as city officials. Having a depth of community involvement shows the school board that the community really cares about its buildings. It also dilutes the district's power within the stakeholder group and helps to reminds school officials that they are the stewards of these buildings on behalf of the public.

2. **Raise awareness of the architectural significance and fine craftsmanship of older school buildings.** This increases the pride of students, faculty, administrators, and the public at large in their schools. It tells students that their education is important and that they are important.

3. **Approach the project on a districtwide basis.** When school districts have to fight over one building at a time, they seem to win more often. By approaching this as a broader issue, on a districtwide basis, you can demonstrate factually what makes some buildings especially significant: architecturally, historically, or culturally.

4. **Take the issue out of crisis mode. Focus on the facts.** This reduces the emotional involvement. It also gives time for community will to surface. That, in the long-term, reduces the conflict between the school district and the community.

5. **Treat the board members as the politicians they are.** Most school board members in this country are elected officials. They want to get re-elected. The way they get re-elected is to get good press. Here is a way you can give them good press—by giving them the chance to show support for a popular issue.

6. **Focus on the most significant buildings.** This scares some preservationists, and it may be a legitimate concern if it gives a school district the sense that whatever isn't on the list of significant buildings can be demolished. Focusing attention and resources raises the level of trust between the school district and the preservation community. It shows that you're not trying to save everything. And if you don't focus on the most significant buildings, the definition of what is significant becomes diluted.

7. **Agree not to fight to save every school.** And agree not to fight to save every school as a school. At All Schools Colorado, we want to save the schools as schools, but are willing to give up the fight if preserving the school proves not to be viable. This too serves to diminish that myth that preservationists want to save everything.

8. **Involve the kids!**

9. **Involve the kids!**

10. **Involved the kids!**

They are eloquent lobbyists. There's hardly a public official who can say "no" to a child, regardless of whether it's at the local level, at the state legislature, or Congress. And what child forgets that he or she made a public presentation before elected officials? This also helps to raise little preservationists. When they see their school building in a new way, their eyes have been opened to see other buildings in new ways, such as noticing windows and arches and gables and even cantilevered roofs.

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Students of all ages made presentations before the school board, landmarks commission, and city council to defend the nomination of their school as a local landmark. The project provided lessons in architecture, history, research and writing, public speaking, and civic involvement.

— Photos by ct Rhoda Pollack Cheroutes, courtesy of All Schools Colorado

tives from the National Trust, Colorado Historical Society, and Historic Denver (which eventually facilitated these meetings). The district facility manager was on the task force, and so were some school district employees including groundskeeping staff, maintenance staff, and office personnel. The League of Women Voters came to the table to mediate because, at that time, there was so little trust between the community and the school district. The Modern Architecture Preservation League took part, and raised the whole community's awareness of modern architecture and its significance.

This task force set the goals and objectives for the project. One of its first decisions was to pursue local designation of the architecturally or historically significant schools. Denver's local ordinance provides a one-year moratorium on demolitions of designated buildings. The task force wanted that one year to provide time to raise community awareness of a building's significance and to find out if the community really did want to preserve it.

Many meetings were spent deciding which buildings should be on the original list of significant schools. There was lots of discussion because no two Denver schools were designed alike until 1953, and that made our job much harder. Eight schools were selected to serve as pilot projects. These eight were distributed throughout the city and spread among elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools.

At the instigation of the school board members on the task force, it was also decided to involve the students and to use the schools as teaching tools. Students would study the history of their school and its architectural style. Eventually, a multidisciplinary curriculum was established—for kindergartners up through high schoolers—with suggested lesson plans in math, science, social studies, history, civics, speech, interviewing, and writing skills.

The students were asked to prepare a three-to-five minute presentation defending the nomination of their school as a local landmark. These presentations were made several times, first to the school board to obtain permission to nominate the school as a landmark. The second presentation was made to the local landmark commission. Finally, students made a third presentations at a public hearing before the city council, because every new locally designated building requires a new ordinance. There have been as many second graders making public presentations to the city council as high schoolers. More than 500 Denver students have participated in this project, and the "love fest" that developed between city council and the students has been wonderful to watch.

Each nomination of a school received a unanimous vote; and

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so we didn't stop after at the eight schools, but kept on nominating schools. When we started the project only one school was designated as a local landmark. Now two dozen schools have been designated. Twenty of them were proposed and defended by their own students.

Where are we now? Colorado Preservation, Inc., has taken this concept statewide through its new program known as "All Schools Colorado." The plan is to test the validity of the "Denver model" in four large and medium-size school districts throughout the state.

School districts in Colorado range in size from 90,000 students to just 45 students in one county. For those small rural or frontier county school districts, CPI is developing a technical assistance unit. A preservation architect and other consultants will go to the school district to identify which of its buildings are architecturally or historically significant and which of those would be viable for reuse or continued use.

We're also creating templates, which can be used in all school districts, that describe the factors a school district must consider when determining the viability of continued use or reuse of a school, and that also describe the barriers to reuse and how to resolve them. We have identified a number of benefits for Colorado school districts. For example, in Colorado, we are lucky—and lucky is the appropriate word—to have State Historical Funds that come from a percentage of gambling revenues and that are distributed by a state agency. More than a million-and-a-half dollars of State Historical Funds have already gone to public schools, and we hope that number will increase over time.

Local Crises Lead to State Policy Reform

Pennsylvania

One of the most significant victories to date for America's older schools started with a local fight in Brentwood, Pa., a suburb of Pittsburgh.

In 1994, the Brentwood school board made plans to close two neighborhood elementary schools—the 1914 Moore School and the 1923 Elroy School—and replace them with an elementary school wing added to the town's combined middle school-high school. The project, which was based on a consultant's recommendation, was estimated to cost $18.2 million.

"The people of the borough were up in arms about the idea of closing neighborhood schools and disrupting the fabric of their community," reports Ronald C. Yochum, Jr., a local resident. Others also worried about increased traffic at the consolidated school site, the added stresses or dangers that elementary school children might face by being on the same large campus with older students, and the tax increase that would be needed to pay for the project.

A group of residents formed "Concerned Citizens of Brentwood Borough" to speak out against the proposal.

Yochum continues: "I got involved because I went to one of the schools and I knew it was in excellent condition for its age." At the time, he was assistant for public policy for the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation ("Landmarks") and he's now its chief information officer.

With help from Preservation Pennsylvania and the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation, residents of Brentwood, Pa., challenge the state's school facilities standards to save two neighborhood elementary schools—the 1914 Moore School, shown here, and the 1923 Elroy School, on cover.

— Photo courtesy of Ron Yochum

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Efforts in Pittsburgh

In the mid-1990s, the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation ("Landmarks") got word of a 10-year plan by the city's Board of Education (BOE) to close at least nine neighborhood schools, demolishing some. Landmarks sprang to action. In April 1998, Landmarks informed the superintendent of the Pittsburgh Public Schools of its intention to nominate certain schools as City Historic Structures.

In October 1998, the group nominated 38 of the city's 90 public school buildings for local historic designation, as well as several former schools now in private hands. Most of these buildings were already listed in the National Register. While this is a testament to their architectural value, it does not prohibit demolition or exterior alterations. Local designation, by contrast, would provide some real protections. Any exterior changes would have to be approved by the city's Historic Review Commission or its staff.

Landmarks' action—and the sheer number of buildings nominated—took BOE (as well as the Historic Review Commission that had to process the applications) by surprise. According to Elisa J. Cavalier, general counsel for Landmarks: "School officials weren't happy initially. They feared delays and increased costs for capital improvement projects. But the school board also realized the nominations were an honor." John Walluck, director of facilities, told the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, "The reason that these buildings are considered landmarks is because the [school] board has taken care of them over the years."

School officials hired a former city planner to help them review and respond to each nomination. After weeks of study, the BOE agreed to accept local historic designation for 12, but contested or reserved judgment on the others. The city's Historic Review Committee recommended that 14 nominations go forward to the city council for a vote.

At this point, the Pittsburgh Department of City Planning, the BOE, and Landmarks tried to negotiate a compromise to present to the city council. Ultimately, they decided that 20 schools would be recommended for designation, 12 would be held to design guidelines, Landmarks would place a preservation easement containing a right of first refusal on four, and two schools would be unencumbered.

But preservationists came in for their own surprise: The city council wanted all 38 nominations presented for a vote. Cavalier continues: "Council did not adopt our proposed negotiated settlement. In fact some council members were offended when schools in their districts had been cut from the list of nominations, and were to be only under guidelines." On December 8, 1999, 22 school buildings were approved for local historic designation, including two privately owned former schools. The other 18 will be coming up for a vote soon.

And in the meantime, Cavalier reports that the BOE has begun to show an even higher regard for its impressive stock of historic buildings. For example, school officials willingly accepted advice from Landmarks and the Historic Review Commission, then redesigned two renovation projects to make the changes more architecturally appropriate.

Through his work, Yochum was aware of numerous renovation projects, most involving buildings in far worse condition than the two elementary schools. "When they said these buildings weren't salvageable, I said, this really doesn't sound right to me."

Yochum believes that the school board members had been heavily influenced by a firm of consultants and architects who lobbied for the project: "In our school district, we got what we called the 'dog and pony show.' The architects toured the buildings and took pictures, then came back with the pictures all pasted up on boards showing cracked concrete, corrosion on pipes, paint flaking off. They'd say, 'Look at this. This is terrible. This all has to be gutted. Wouldn't it be better just to build something new?' I found it sort of comical because I knew most of what they were showing was just cosmetic."

He continues: "Then you add politics into the mix. Most school boards are run by people who are local and they want to be responsive to community needs. They don't want to be labeled as 'not spending enough on children's education.'"

Members of Concerned Citizens of Brentwood Borough testified against the project repeatedly at school board meetings. They also hired their own architect to determine if the elementary schools could indeed be renovated and kept in use. "Every indicator was pointing to the fact that these buildings could be restored—and still the school board wouldn't listen," Yochum says.

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"It came down to the wire, so we said if you can't beat them this way, beat them at the polls." Yochum and four others opposed to the plan for a consolidated school ran for the school board as a slate. They won by 70 percent! With this mandate from the voters, they got to work planning renovations of the two elementary schools.

That's when they came upon the next hurdle—the state Department of Education's school construction reimbursement criteria (called the "Basic Education Circular"). While the Department of Education would reimburse about one-third of the cost of new construction, its guidelines made it virtually impossible for Brentwood to get any reimbursement for renovating its existing schools. There were two specific problems: First, the state would not reimburse a renovation project that would cost more than 60 percent of the cost of new construction. Second, the state would not reimburse the cost of renovating any multi-story school with wood framing.

The Brentwood school board was able to get a variance for the first rule, but not the second. Board members saw that they needed to take their fight to another level.

Yochum shared these concerns with his boss, Arthur Ziegler, president of Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation. Recognizing that these same rules were affecting the fate of older schools throughout the state, he also alerted Preservation Pennsylvania.

Together, Landmarks and Preservation Pennsylvania began to address the state's school construction reimbursement criteria. A study commissioned by the two groups found that the education department's guidelines went far beyond local, state, and national building codes. For example, if the Brentwood elementary school with wood framing were to be turned over to another use, such as senior housing, the building would just need a sprinkler system to meet fire-safety codes—but that solution was not allowed by the education department. The study also found no correlation between injuries sustained in school fires and the buildings' construction type.

Preservation Pennsylvania turned its attention to affecting state policy. Caroline Boyce, then the group's executive director, described Preservation Pennsylvania's successful strategy during a presentation she gave at the 1998 National Preservation Conference in Savannah.

The group was already working on a closely related concern—curbing sprawl. Boyce recalls: "In fact, we had been dealing with phone calls over the years from communities around the state [concerned] about schools being abandoned or demolished; new schools being built on the outskirts of town in sort of Wal-Mart style...further encouraging people to move out to the fringes of communities and abandon our cities and towns."

First Preservation Pennsylvania convened a meeting of its regional advocacy coordinators (a formal network of people working in organizations with related interests throughout the state) to brief them on the problem. Then it organized a core committee to work on the issue in depth. The committee included Ziegler and Yochum, two architects with experience in school renovation projects, a journalist who advised on media strategy, a representative from the state historic preservation office who provided information on endangered schools throughout the state, and later also an advisor from the National Trust.

The committee arranged to meet with representatives of the Governor's office and the Department of Education. "We had a friendly exchange, in which the Governor's office and the Department of Education seemed to show a genuine interest in our concerns," Boyce says. Yet many months of meetings failed to bring results.

In mid-June 1998, Preservation Pennsylvania released its annual list of endangered places, called Pennsylvania At Risk. This time the list was devoted entirely to schools. A special report gave an overview of the problem, then described or listed dozens of schools under threat as well as a few success stories. The report also proposed changes to the Department of Education's school construction reimbursement policy. Readers were urged to write to the Department of Education in support of those changes.

Preservation Pennsylvania considered taking its concerns to the state legislature. Fortunately, it had a strong ally there—David Argall, a state representative who chaired the Joint House and Senate Conservation Committee. He, too, recognized the relationship between sprawl development and loss of neighborhood schools.

Argall organized a public hearing to take place on June 29, 1998—just about a week after the release of the Pennsylvania at Risk list. Participants included members of the House and the Senate Education Committees, Preservation Pennsylvania's core committee, and a representative from the State Association of School Boards, among others. The hearing was broadcast live on a statewide cable network, then replayed several times.

"It made a big difference," Boyce says. "The newspaper coverage of this whole issue just

went sky high. We had editorials in major papers. There was supposed to have been a second public hearing but the Department of Education pulled a halt to everything, changed their rules, and they never had to go through the second public hearing."

On July 1, 1998, the Department of Education issued a memo to "clarify existing policies governing requests for school construction reimbursement." It stated: "School districts should take all reasonable efforts to preserve and protect school buildings that are on or eligible for local or National historic registers." In addition, if continued use as a school was not possible, then "school districts are encouraged to develop an adaptive reuse plan for the building that incorporates an historic easement or covenant to avoid the building's abandonment or demolition."

Then on September 8, 1998, the Department of Education held a press conference to announce revisions to its school construction guidelines. The Secretary of the Department of Education, the Secretary of the Department of Environmental Protection, and representatives from Preservation Pennsylvania and the National Trust all shared the spotlight.

The rule against reimbursing renovations that would cost more than 60 percent of new construction was gone. So was the prohibition against reimbursement for buildings with wood framing. "In the end the new language was almost exactly what we recommended," Boyce adds.

This is not an unqualified victory. These changes do not ensure the continued use and protection of all historic school buildings in the state. But when communities want to keep their older schools in use, they will no longer be hindered by inflexible state regulations.

Back in Brentwood, Pa., the Moore School and the Elroy School had both been renovated during 1997, at a final cost of $5.8 million. In each building, some spaces were reorganized to suit educational programs, an elevator was added, windows were replaced, mechanical and electrical systems were updated, and classrooms were wired for computer technology.

Unfortunately, because the Department of Education still required this at the time, the wood floors in one of the schools had to be completely rebuilt with concrete and steel. Yochum estimates that this may have added nearly $1 million dollars over the life of the bond.

But overall, the Concerned Citizens of Brentwood Borough are pleased with the outcome of their battle. After all, Yochum reflects, "How often does a small group of people and a little school district get to affect change on this scale?"

Massachusetts

Lincoln Elementary School, built in the early 1900s as a high school, is a centerpiece of the town of Winchester, Mass., near Boston. Its architect was a graduate of the Ecole des Beaux Arts, and illustrations of the building were published internationally when it was completed. Architect Jamie Devol, whose children attended the school, knows and admires the building and its site: "It's really quite handsome, sited on a knoll overlooking the town center. It offers amenities such as wide corridors, high ceilings, large windows that let in an abundance of light, natural woodwork, and corner classrooms. In the 1930s a very nice auditorium was added as well as a gymnasium. Both are used by community performing arts and sports groups, serving children throughout the town."

Sited to overlook a pond in the town center, the school is linked by open space with the town hall and town library, creating a civic center. Devol notes: "Retail business in Winchester Center is strengthened by the center location of several civic buildings. The Lincoln School draws 400 children and many parents into the Center every school day. These residents patronize local businesses such as the book, toy, and clothing stores, and the food and coffee shops. Taking this high-use school away from the town center would have a negative impact. Also, the location makes it easy for students to make full use of the town's resources, including a museum of photography, a temple, churches, a dance studio, the public library, and the middle school playing field."

During the 1950s, the building received some inappropriate additions and renovations. Since then, it has suffered from a lack of maintenance.

The town's Educational Facilities Planning and Building Committee, an appointed body, had been considering options for renovating the Lincoln School and others. But about a month before its final report was due, the group concluded that it would be cheaper and easier to vacate Lincoln Elementary, demolish another school about a mile away, then build a new elementary school on that site. The new school would be smaller and lack amenities such as the separate auditorium.

The decision dismayed many in the community. Residents raised numerous objections during public hearings in the spring of 1996—but the Building Committee would not budge. There may have been several agendas at work.

First, the Lincoln School property was a prime candidate for redevelopment. Three other former schools in town had been converted into condominiums, and Lincoln's site was superior. The 900-square-foot classrooms with commanding views of the pond and town center would make splendid condominiums. Some believed that the building itself would fare better in the hands of a private developer.

"Others assume that new is always better," Devol continues. "They maintained that to best serve our children we needed a new school. However, I believe that a greater gift to future generations is to preserve irreplaceable treasures, both manmade and natural. Demolishing a school in order to build a smaller school with fewer amenities on a smaller site, with no plans for the future of the vacated historic school, is culturally and environmentally shortsighted."

But the main arguments against renovating the Lincoln School were financial. Earlier the Building Committee had hired an architect to produce renovation plans for Lincoln. "The architectural firm's initial renovation plans that were used to compare the cost of renovating Lincoln to building a new school relied on a large and costly addition to solve some ADA problems," Devol says. "In addition, the design gutted much of the building, including commodious fire stairs with ornate railings at either end of the building. Cost estimates for the renovation came in significantly higher than those for the new school."

Even more daunting, the Building Committee had been told by a representative of the state's department of education that state reimbursement would be provided to build a new school but not to renovate the current one. Ordinarily, the state's school building assistance (SBA) program provides at least half of the funds for school construction projects. The amount available to Winchester, based on a state formula, would be 63 percent. While there is no written policy against funding renovations, SBA staffers had tended to promote new construction rather than renovations.

Winchester's Building Committee was told by an SBA staffer that the Lincoln School would not qualify for state reimbursement because it has interior wood framing—even though there is nothing in the state guidelines against this.

To fund construction of a new school, voters would have to approve a tax override, allowing the town to increase real estate taxes. A group of residents formed "Citizens for a Better Plan" to campaign against the proposal to replace Lincoln with a new school.

First, they publicly questioned why state reimbursement would not be provided for renovation of

"Photographs of Lincoln Elementary School taken five or more decades ago depict a lovely, well-maintained structure built with civic pride," reflects Winchester, Mass., architect Jamie Devol. But since then, the school has suffered from unsuitable alterations and neglect. (Historical photo above.)

— Photos courtesy of the Winchester Archival Center and John C. Clemson

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State Legislation Update

Maine

The state legislature created a new Revolving Renovation Fund to improve the condition of existing schools in 1998. Previously, state money was available only to finance new school construction, which took place primarily in outlying areas. The Maine State Planning Office and the Maine Department of Education have published a new brochure, "The ABC's of School Site Selection," which encourages school districts to avoid school sprawl and to consider renovating and/or expanding existing schools whenever possible. It also encourages the school districts to pick sites that allow children to walk or bike to school.

Maryland

State guidelines say that school construction projects "should not encourage sprawl development" and "must be consistent with the local government's plans" for growth, community revitalization, and preservation. On August 21, 1999, Maryland Governor Parris N. Glendening restated earlier commitments to curb urban sprawl through the state's funding formula for schools.

Vermont

The state board of education adopted a policy in August 1997 stating, among other things, that "continued use of historic schools is consistent with Vermont's efforts to focus public and private investment in community centers." The policy said that "renovations, including major repairs, and additions to existing school buildings shall be given preference over new school development taking into consideration the educational needs of students and that the costs of rehabilitation do not unreasonably exceed the costs of such new development.

the Lincoln School. Ultimately the group appealed to the state's Commissioner of Education, who overturned the SBA staffer's decision and allowed the reimbursement. But by then, the town's Building Committee and others had become convinced that new construction would still be a better financial deal.

Citizens for a Better Plan also contacted Historic Massachusetts for help.

Historic Massachusetts had been hearing from communities throughout the state "and they were all saying the same thing," Margaret Dyson, the group's current president, recalls. "We were told that communities were being forced to vacate their older, historic school buildings because the Department of Education would not reimburse for renovations."

In 1997, Historic Massachusetts's Endangered Historic Resources list focused on school buildings, and the group launched a research and advocacy project around the issue. First volunteers carefully reviewed the regulations for the school building assistance program to be certain that there was nothing in the law or regulations that prevented the state from funding school renovations. The group hired an intern to research all funded school projects from fiscal years 1994 through 1997 and discovered that there had been a significant number of renovation and renovation/addition projects in other communities, including renovations of older and historic schools. Finally the group reviewed news clippings and notes of town meetings and committee meetings "to try to put together a paper trail." This verified what they had suspected: "Department of Education staff, without any basis in their own regulations or Massachusetts law, were basically making additional rules."

Historic Massachusetts had become "the place to call if you had a problem with your school." When some communities complained that SBA staff members had refused to allow state reimbursement for renovations, Historic Massachusetts was able to put them in contact with other communities—sometimes only a short distance away—that had completed successful renovations with state funding. Historic Massachusetts produced a technical report on the issue that was inserted in its newsletter and widely distributed around the state.

Dyson continues: "There were certainly times when I thought we would never, never get anything changed. But when we were about two years into the project, we got into a casual conversation about school buildings at a National Trust regional meeting in New Haven. We found out

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that a lot of states in the northeast region were having this problem." Historic Massachusetts especially drew information and inspiration from the extensive research and advocacy work that had been done in Pennsylvania.

A turning point came in 1999. Representatives of Historic Massachusetts had been making presentations before the state legislature on a regular basis, appearing whenever there was an upcoming vote on transferring public land or protected farmland for use as a new school site. Because of that, the group came to the attention of the state's Office of Administration and Finance, which requested a meeting. Representatives of Historic Massachusetts have met with members of that office several times, and also put them in touch with local groups, architects, and preservation professionals.

At their first meeting, representatives from Historic Massachusetts had their arguments ready. One was that construction of new schools was taking away irreplaceable parkland and farmland. Because state regulations forbid using state money to acquire sites for school construction, localities were using public parkland instead. That raised the concern of environmentalists in government and throughout the state, notably the state's Secretary of Environmental Affairs, Robert Durand.

The Office of Administration and Finance was especially concerned about containing the costs of school construction projects. Historic Massachusetts brought in architects with renovation experience to describe the potential cost savings in doing renovations rather than new construction—sometimes directly contradicting what staff from the Department of Education had said. Dyson also cited data on the economic benefits of preservation, explaining that even if the renovation projects cost as much as new construction, more of that money stays in the local economy, with more going to labor than to materials. "That was a very interesting argument to them," she says.

And now the tide is turning for older schools in Massachusetts.

In July 1999, the State Commissioner of Education issued a memo claiming he had "been asked by several superintendents, legislators, and municipal officials to explain the policies of the Department's school building assistance (SBA) program regarding reuse and renovation of existing buildings." The memo states that "our preference is to reuse and renovate existing buildings whenever it is cost efficient and can meet the educational needs of the district"; and also that "renovation projects qualify for the same reimbursements, and are subject to the same cost limits, as new construction." In addition, the memo notes that state guidelines on site size "are recommended but not required." This is significant because towns had been told that they had to abandon older schools because the sites were too small to meet state guidelines.

The governor has now proposed revamping the school building assistance program, moving it out of the Department of Education and into the state's Facilities Management Division, which includes specialists in construction and in environmental planning. Dyson reports that "we're also hearing, just informally, that the current Department of Education staff has become much more flexible" in its reimbursement decisions.

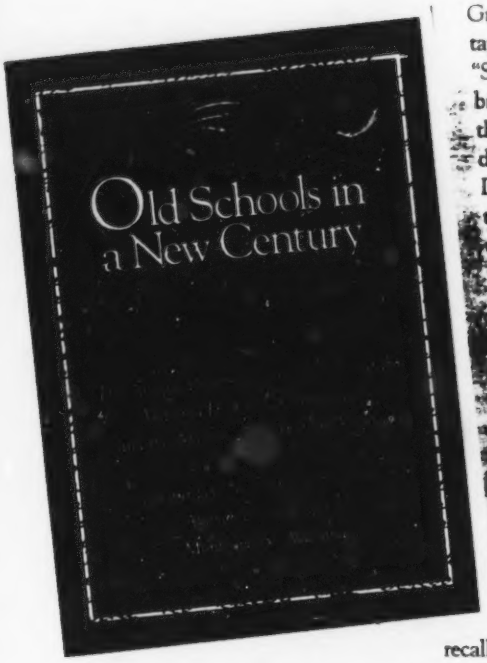
Back in Winchester, Mass., the tax override needed to fund the new elementary school was defeated in November 1996, indicating that the majority of voters preferred renovating the existing school. Following that vote, the Building Committee was re-formed in January. Three new members were appointed who favored renovations of the Lincoln Elementary School rather than new construction.

But the subcommittee working on the Lincoln School was not given any money to develop new, scaled-back plans for renovating it. They were told to use the renovation plans that had been rejected as being too costly. Working on a pro bono basis, local architect Jamie Devol produced floorplans showing several options for renovating the school. "We solved major problems, notably ADA compliance, by reestablishing the original central entrance which had been removed in the 1950s. We saved the stairs and the ornamental railings with some simple adjustments, and looked at creative ways to use the interior spaces more efficiently. With these plans, it was hard to deny that the building could be renovated for continued use as a school.

Finally the town allocated money to hire an architect to do formal plans and cost estimates. This time, the cost of renovating the Lincoln School was estimated to be about the same as building the smaller new school.

Town officials decided to allocate $12 million to renovate the Lincoln School. Again, voters had to approve a tax override to fund the project. This time, in spring 1998, it passed. Construction is scheduled to begin in August 2000.

Similar battles to save older school buildings have been won in other Massachusetts communities—including Falmouth,



Both preservationists and members of the education community participated in this first statewide conference on historic school buildings. The meeting provided "a chance to start a dialogue

Great Barrington, Mattapoisett, and Woburn. "So we didn't have a big announcement by the governor, like they did in Pennsylvania," Dyson concludes, "But this shows what getting a little information in the hands of people can really do."

A Coordinated Statewide Response

Alabama

Brandon Brazil, executive director of the Alabama Preservation Alliance (APA), recalls how his group first got involved in protecting historic school buildings in August 1998: "We got a call from the Alabama Historical Commission (AHC), the state historic preservation office, looking for help to save the Skyline Elementary School. This was Friday and the school was coming down Monday."

The Skyline School had been built in 1936 as part of a New Deal resettlement community. Skyline was one of two such projects in the state, and it was the last remaining one. Now the Jackson County school board planned to raze it to build a new school on the same site.

With demolition of the Skyline School certain and just days away, an area resident had called Robert Gamble at the Alabama Historical Commission for help. Gamble, who runs the state's endangered properties program, recommended getting an opposition force together. But to stop the demolition he turned to Brandon Brazil, the new director of the Alabama Preservation Alliance. Unlike the state agency, the APA, a nonprofit organization, could bring an injunction to halt the demolition and buy some time.

Immediately, the APA retained local counsel (who later became a board member). By Monday morning, the APA found a sympathetic judge who issued a temporary restraining order until a trial could be held in a week or so. That gave the APA and the Commission time to strategize. At that point, a tremendous amount of intensive work was carried out by APA and Commission staff as well as local residents. The APA pursued the legal angle. The Commission worked on local organizing and providing hard information from engineers and architects on the feasibility of retaining the building.

The APA recognized that it might lose the legal battle, but still win in the court of public opinion. Fearing a protracting fight that would likely go to the state supreme court on the issue of whether the APA actually had standing in the matter, the school board agreed to hold a public meeting in one month's time.

Ultimately, the school board agreed to keep the Skyline School in use. Brazil notes that "having a good building and good site helped." Because the building was raised off the ground, computer cables could be run under it. An addition expanded the school's capacity.

"Then my phone started ringing off the hook, lit up like a Christmas tree, as people in other communities learned of our success, and we got involved in more school interventions," Brazil continues. "And to compound matters, we had a new governor whose policy was to get rid of school portables, [temporary classroom buildings] which is an admirable goal, but unfortunately a lot of those portables back up the historic buildings."

Realizing that it needed a more systematic approach to helping communities save their older school buildings, the APA and the Commission joined forces. The two organizations cosponsor an annual conference with a different theme each year. They decided to devote two consecutive ones to the theme of "Old Schools in a New Century."

Careful advance planning was essential, says Ellen Mertins, the Commission's director of public policy and planning. Organizers proposed forming two task forces, one concerned with promoting continued use of older schools, the other looking at options for reuse of surplus schools. The challenge was to determine which organizations play a major role in the education community, then get key people from those organizations to commit to the project. The task force concerned with continued use of schools included an architectural historian; an architect from the state department of education; a school district superintendent; and representatives from the Alabama State Building Commission, Alabama Association of School Boards, and a statewide education reform group that works with rural schools.

The first conference, held in October 1999, "was a chance to start a dialogue between preservationists and the education community—and to learn how to speak their language," Brazil says. Task force members shared their points of view in panel discussions. There was also a slide presentation called "Happy Endings for Old Schools," showing case studies of successful rehabilitation and adaptive use projects—including the Skyline School.

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Following the conference, the two task forces continued meeting to draft answers to specific study questions. The Schools Use task force was asked to determine: 1) What value do these older buildings have for us? 2) What are the obstacles to keeping them as functioning schools? Are there state and local policies that discourage continued use? Are there real functional and structural problems associated with adapting the buildings for contemporary teaching? Are there perceptual problems that discourage continued use? 3) Which of these obstacles can we affect? 4) How can we best go about making those changes? 5) What audiences do we want to attract to next year's conference? What kinds of programs, speakers, and formats will work best?

The task forces' responses to their assigned questions will be presented at the second conference in October 2000. Mertins already sees some practical proposals emerging. Areas of discussion have included ways to improve communications between educators and preservationists, and ways to encourage school systems to fund maintenance and develop cyclical maintenance plans.

Mertins concludes: "Preservationists tend to like the excitement of a crisis, but this is about laying the groundwork long before there is a crisis—of gaining credibility and building partnerships with the education community. It's saying, 'We have a joint problem. How do we solve it?'"

Brazil agrees: "It was helpful to hear their point of view, and I think we made some inroads with them. I really sympathize with the school board folks. They want to do the right thing, but preservation is low on their list of priorities. Sometimes it's just a matter of giving them options."

The Real Solution—Good Stewardship

Ogden High School, Ogden, Utah

When it was completed in 1937, Ogden High School was a showplace—and it still is! Built as a WPA project, it was the first million-dollar school constructed in the U.S. The care given to this building shows in the quality of the details. The exterior proclaims its Art Deco character with bold pilasters and decorative masonry, terra cotta, and metal grill transoms. Interior features, which have been well preserved and largely unchanged, include fine plaster work, polychromatic wall stencils, patterned tile floors, marble dados, and ornate light fixtures. The elaborately decorated auditorium has been an important resource for the entire Ogden community as ballets, symphonies, and other professional and school performances enliven the stage.

Regarded as one of the finest Art Deco structures in Utah, this National Register building has long been a source of pride for students and the city. "Fortunately the school district recognizes that it has a historically and architecturally significant building," says Kirk Huffaker, community services director for Utah Heritage Foundation. "The district realizes that the public defends the building and that they need to respect it with any project they undertake. The challenge now is to find the financial resources and expertise to get future projects accomplished."

The school building received some sensitive remodeling during the late 1960s and the 1970s, and exterior cleaning and repairs in the mid-1980s. Within the last two years, the school has been completely wired for the

After the Alabama statewide conference, "Old Schools in a New Century," the task force on continued use of schools developed this questionnaire, which was distributed throughout the state to school superintendents and members of the Association of School Boards. This "became an education tool that opened the door for discussion," says Ellen Mertins of the Alabama Historical Commission.

Old Schools In a New Century

Background Information

Generally, historic buildings are defined as those that are 50 years old or older. The State Department of Education reports that, in Alabama, there are hundreds of historic school buildings in use. In the next few years, the number of historic buildings will increase since there were a considerable number of schools built in the late 1940s and in the 1950s.

1. Do you consider any of your school buildings or other buildings in your community historic?

   Yes _____ No _____

2. If yes, what do you feel is significant about these buildings?

3. What values do older buildings have for your school system and your community?

4. Has your school system or community taken any action to preserve historic buildings?

   Yes _____ No _____

5. If yes, what are the buildings' current uses?

6. If yes, whom would you recommend that we contact regarding any preservation plan for the buildings?

7. Would general information on the following be of interest to your school board or to your community leaders?

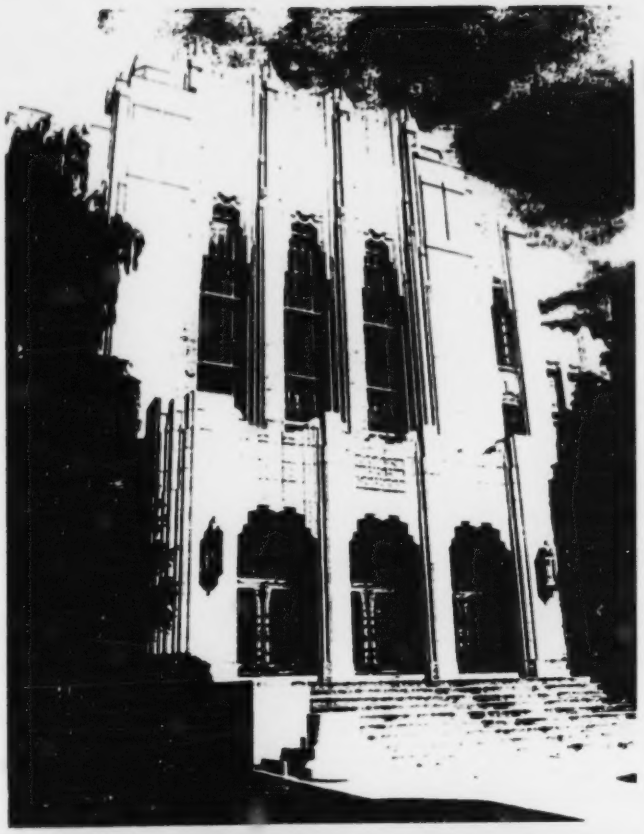
   Public information regarding the following issues:

   - The economics of preserving historic buildings;
   - How to make an assessment of a historic building;
   - Identifying liabilities of historic buildings; and
   - Identifying strategies for preserving and reusing historic buildings.

   Yes _____ No _____

8. What other information would be of interest to you or to your community leaders?

9. Any comments would be welcome.



Ogden High School, a Utah landmark, is a centerpiece of its community, hosting numerous cultural events by school groups and professional performers.

—Photos courtesy of Larry Leatham, former principal, Ogden High School

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internet, with wires hidden behind walls so as not to detract from the building's historic character. "They went through a great deal of effort to not damage significant interior features—and it actually ended up coming in under budget," Huffaker recalls.

Representatives of the Utah Heritage Foundation and the National Trust have been acting as resources for the Ogden City School District. The organizations will work with the district to let it know about special funding opportunities, arrange for architects who specialize in old buildings to do preliminary condition assessments, and in the long term, assist in establishing a systematic rehabilitation program for Ogden High and a districtwide preservation policy.

Like most school districts, Ogden's has to stretch its funds to keep all of its 32 schools in good repair. Ogden High School now needs plumbing and electrical wiring upgrades. Even more disturbing to the school community and the city, the auditorium has deteriorated to the point where the school may cease to hold graduation ceremonies there. The stucco walls need painting; the plaster work is crumbling; the ceiling has water stains; the gold, silver, and bronze gilding is chipping and fading; and standard auditorium functions such as lighting and air conditioning need to be upgraded or added. The rough-textured stucco contains asbestos, so the rehab work will require a specialized crew and containment measures.

On the plus side, the Ogden School District already has a tradition of proactively addressing the district's needs. The Ogden School Foundation, a separate nonprofit arm of the school district, raises donations from parents, alumni, and corporate sources, then awards grants to individual schools for special capital and educational projects. In the mid-1980s, the Foundation covered the cost to have the auditorium's walnut seatbacks refinished and leather seats replaced. Recently, a donor made a contribution, through the Foundation, to improve the auditorium's sound system and add display cases in the school's rotunda.

Preservation Organizations Take Steps to Protect Historic Schools

Cincinnati, Ohio

In 1997, when the Cincinnati Preservation Association (CPA) heard that the Cincinnati Board of Education was launching a Facilities Master Plan, it sprang into action and completed a historic inventory of all 81 school buildings in use, using volunteers. The survey identified 34 eligible for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Beth Sullebarger, executive director of the Cincinnati Preservation Association, reports: "When the Facilities Master Plan Advisory Committee started the plan, historic significance was not one of the criteria, but they made it one after we presented members with the inventory." The plan originally called for continued use of 19 historic buildings, but three more were spared after community members lobbied to save their schools, citing the survey findings. She adds that the Master Plan showed that in all but two cases, repair of the older buildings would be cheaper than new construction.

To highlight its efforts, CPA's 1998 annual meeting took place in a former school building converted to offices that is an award-winning example of adaptive

use, and included a slide presentation on preservation of historic school buildings.

CPA is now working with communities and the school board to help keep more older schools in use and to promote reuse options for surplus schools.

Florida

With a grant from the Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation, Tampa Preservation, Inc. (TPI), produced *Historic Schools Reuse* in 1997. This book by Jan Abell, FAIA, and Lee Braun outlines state and local government policies affecting school buildings, gives options for continued use and reuse, and provides case studies. (For ordering information, see page 30.)

Abell had proposed the book after working as an architect on several historic schools and dealing with the Florida Department of Education. For this project, TPI wanted the Department of Education as a partner, because, "otherwise, it's just preservationists talking to each other." The DOE reviewed the contents, paid for printing, and distributed the book to school boards throughout the state.

Historic School Reuse has also been used as a text for workshops offered jointly by the Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation and the Florida Trust. Three annual workshops have been presented so far in different parts of the state, with announcements sent out both to the area school districts and to names on the mailing lists of the Florida Trust and the Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation.

On the local level, with funding from its local school district (Hillsborough County Schools), the National Trust, and Time-Warner, TPI hired two architectural historians to survey all local schools more than 50 years old. The resulting document, with four-page descriptions and photos of each school, can now be used by school board members to guide future decision making. According to Abell: "The document does a terrific job of bringing attention to these schools and being objective about their condition and significance. The elected school board members appreciate that because it takes them off the hotseat [in determining which schools are more deserving of special care]."

With information and help from the Cincinnati Preservation Association, parents convinced the school board to keep the 1901 Hyde Park Public School in use

— Photo courtesy of Beth Sullebarger, Cincinnati Preservation Association

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How to Save Your Historic Neighborhood School

10 Action Steps

1. Focus your preservation campaign on the **needs of school children**. Demonstrate the benefits for the children of renovating the historic school. For example, if the school district were not investing public funds in the costly new facility, how could those funds be spent to improve the children's academic achievement? Text books? Computers? Teachers salaries? Take care not to dismiss the school district's desire to improve its facilities.

2. Instead, develop a **feasible, cost-effective alternative strategy**—such as renovation and modernization of the existing historic structure—that would provide a first-class educational facility. This alternative is the heart of your constructive response. Fund raise to hire an architect. Apply for a Preservation Services Fund grant from the National Trust. Prepare your architect to serve as an expert advocate for preservation, not simply as an independent, disinterested outsider.

3. Help decision makers to visualize the quality of the educational facility that can be achieved through renovation and modernization. **Visual images are key**. Create persuasive drawings of your alternative and photographs of successfully rehabilitated schools. Distribute them widely in the community. If possible, host field trips to nearby renovated historic schools.

4. Be certain to **involve teachers, parents, and school children** in your preservation campaign. They will be perceived as the most critical stakeholders and persuasive voices. Also involve a broad coalition of neighbors, elected officials, alumni, retired teachers, school employees, Parent Teacher Associations, neighborhood associations, as well as preservation groups.

5. Fully analyze the school district's proposal to replace the historic school. **Isolate and answer each of the district's key issues** that are perceived as barriers to renovation (e.g., cost, structural instability, code problems, fire safety, accessibility, parking, technology wiring). Gather as much hard, objective information as possible. **Use your architect to address these barriers**. Consult your state historic preservation office.

6. After you've analyzed the school district's proposal, dig deeper. Your historic school may be threatened by **state-level administrative policies** that inadvertently preclude preservation of some historic schools. For example, some states will not reimburse a local school district's costs of historic renovation. If so, challenge the policy. Seek a variance or a more liberal application of the policy.

7. Focus on the **"frugality argument."** Compare the costs of new construction versus rehabilitation. Put a price tag on the school district's proposal and on your alternative approach. Preservation may appeal to certain taxpayers if you argue that your alternative approach would improve the school while protecting the public's past investment in community infrastructure (i.e., the historic school) and avoiding the extra burden of the school district's high-dollar solution. For more information on the economics of historic preservation, contact your regional office of the National Trust.

8. Help your neighbors understand the **community impacts** of the school district's plan. Abandonment of a historic school may lead to vandalism and a decline in neighboring property values. If a historic school is demolished, it may remain a vacant lot for years or be replaced with an undesirable new use. Consolidation of historic neighborhood schools into a large and anonymous "sprawl school" on the outskirts of town may lead to lower academic achievement or a strained sense of community. Moreover, such sprawl locations often add to transportation costs that put financial pressures on families and governments alike.

9. Publicize the **benefits of preserving the historic school.** Historic neighborhood schools can enrich students' learning experience, allowing children to walk to school, to attend a smaller, more intimate school with friends from their own neighborhood, and to grow up immersed in the historic school's tradition and surrounded by its distinguished and often unique architecture. And, there's considerable evidence that smaller schools improve academic achievement.

10. Use every **grass-roots political organizing strategy** in the book. Develop a clear, succinct message. Generate letters to the editor. Borrow mailing lists and send out flyers. Post yard signs. Place radio ads. Host town meetings. Go door-to-door. Circulate a petition. Create a website to present your case and provide up-to-date information. Don't hesitate to ask for donations to support the cause.

    Finally, school construction questions can be very sensitive, divisive issues. So, always take the high road and make every effort to establish a cooperative working relationship with the school district.

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Big Cities Make a Commitment

Boston

Boston has 130 public school buildings. Most were built from the early part of the century through the 1920s and '30s, with some new construction in the 1960s and '70s, but very little since.

In 1996 Mayor Thomas M. Menino made a commitment to bring computer wiring and internet networking to every Boston public school, pledging $50 million in city funds for the project. Additional aid came from the federal E-Rate Program, designed to help American schools get internet access, with the level of assistance based on the number of students that qualify for free or reduced-cost lunches.

The project was initiated by putting "starter networks," linking a limited number of rooms, in all buildings. At the same time, teachers were required to get at least 30 hours of specialized professional development courses (on their own time) in order to have access to technology in the classroom.

Then the city undertook complete rewiring (both technology and electrical wiring) of every room in every school, doing one "package" of 15 to 20 schools at a time. Steven Gag, technology advisor to the mayor's office, reports that 50 percent of schools are now completely rewired, and the rest are, or soon will be, either under construction or in the design phase. "Putting in the technology wiring has been pretty easy," he says. "Providing more electrical power and wiring has taken more money and planning than the technology wiring has. In the older buildings, there was usually only one outlet per classroom."

Khadijah Abdus-Sabur, AIA, assistant director of planning and engineering for the Boston School Department, oversees budget planning and design review. She admits that here have been aesthetic compromises; for example, she is disappointed by how much surface wiring had to go into classrooms, because it couldn't be threaded through the brick or plaster walls. But the school system has made a special effort in architecturally significant spaces. One such case is the Art Deco Thomas A. Edison Middle School. To avoid covering any part of the highly decorated ceiling and walls in its lobby, a cable tray was run across the floor above it and then back down. "That was expensive, but it was worth it," Abdus-Sabur says.

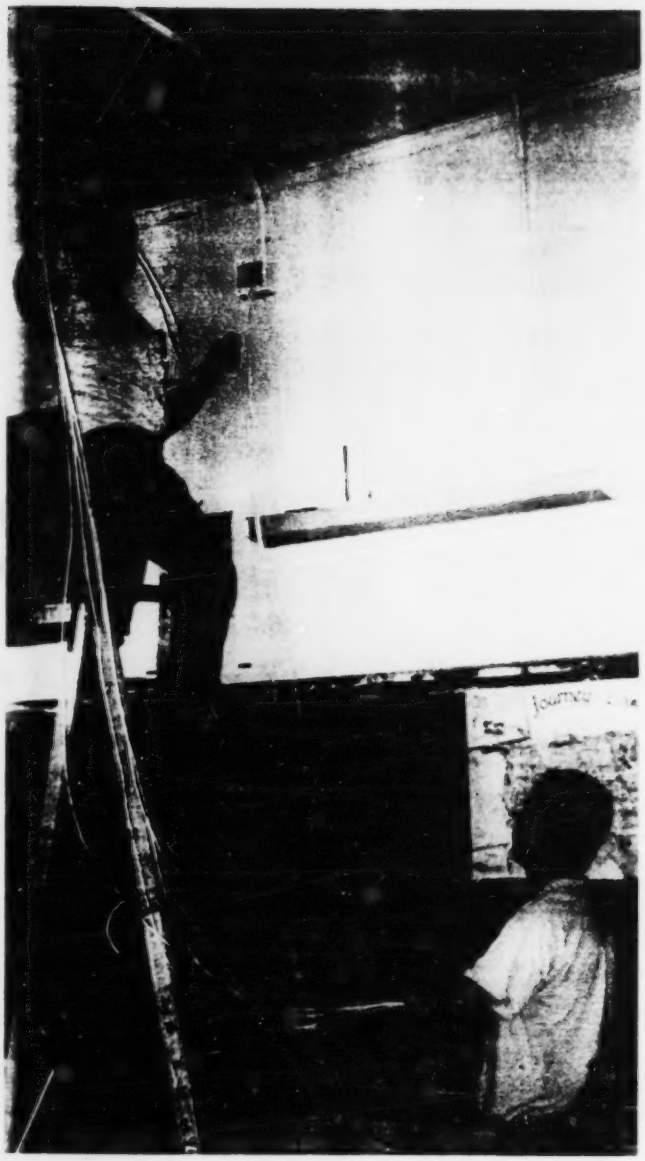
She adds: "Construction has been a bigger problem than aesthetics." To avoid disrupting classes in session, contractors may only work from 3:00 to 11:00 p.m. and must meet strict air quality standards, using special equipment to keep brick dust down.

So while it has been a daunting project, she concludes, "There was never a thought that we couldn't get it done."

Chicago

In 1994 the Historic Resources Committee of the Chicago AIA worked with the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois to review the city's stock of public schools. The AIA committee visited school buildings and defined a criteria for historic schools. It is similar to the criteria for national landmarking, except the minimum age for consideration is 25 years instead of 50. The committee felt that these "younger" schools (and future landmarks) needed some protections so that they were not lost before making it to 50 years.

Bill Latoza, chair of the committee and author of a forthcoming book on the architecture of Chicago public schools, relates: "Schools by great architects—such as [William Le Baron] Jenney, and, of course, [[Dwight Heald] Perkins, the master of the modern school building—are found throughout Chicago. We saw richness in the schools, discovered frescoes, WPA murals, and excellent architectural detailing...We found schools with terra cotta and masonry facades,



All of Boston's public schools are getting electrical upgrades and technology wiring, thanks to a $50 million initiative by the city's mayor.

— *Photo by Sue McCann Boston Public Schools, courtesy of Steven Gag*

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beautiful windows, wide hallways, special classrooms, high ceilings—great places for students to study and learn. We also found buildings once rich in character and design, destroyed by inappropriate maintenance, repairs and additions."

After visiting the 575 schools (comprising more than 800 buildings), 47 were selected as historic. The committee and the Chicago Public Schools agreed that this list wasn't final; more schools could be added as the committee learned more about the individual buildings.

Beginning in 1996, the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) began a massive, five-year effort to renovate 557 schools—the largest public school renovation project in the country. The renovation program will cost $2.5 billion over five years. Work is being done by local architects and contractors under the guidance of two "managing-architect teams"—one for renovations and one for new construction. Renovations are led by Latoza's firm, Bauer Latoza Studio.

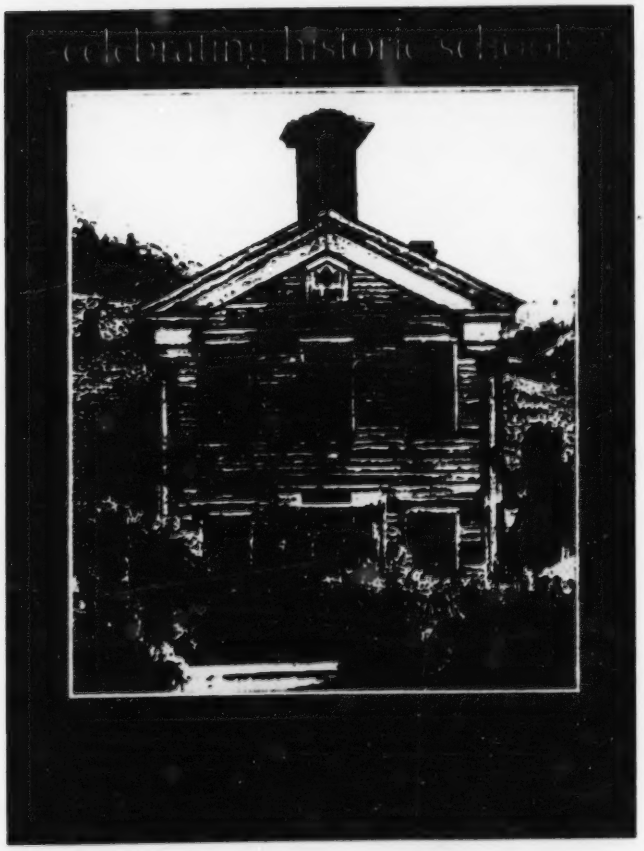
With this type of volume, CPS was able to mass purchase a number of items. Latoza explains: "For example, purchasing more than $100 million dollars of windows allowed us to get the attention of the window manufacturers. Traco and Graham met with us and understood the needs and requirements of the program—that we wanted windows that matched the original design intent. We surveyed a number of schools and learned that we had three different types of brick molding, five different types of muntins, five standard colors, and a number of divided light options. Working together, they agreed to manufacture the profiles, styles, and colors we needed—adding them to their standard product lines for others to use—a win/win situation for us, the manufacturers, and others."

The managing architectural firm developed standards for the 50 architects working on the renovation projects, then distributed specifications, construction forms, and other information via a password-protected website.

When the managing architects visited schools, they could go into classrooms and open the web page to show students. "This allowed for impromptu lessons on architecture, math, history, and the importance of their school," Latoza says. The students could also view their friends' schools on the website, "connecting them to the community of the Chicago Public Schools."

For Preservation Week 2000, the Montana State Historic Preservation Office drew attention to its historic schools with a poster that featured the 1874 Bank School/Masonic Lodge building

— Courtesy of Ellen Baumler, Montana Historical Society



Raising Community Awareness

Boulder, Colo.

An annual homes tour offered by Historic Boulder, in a different neighborhood each year, also highlights the neighborhood school. For example, the 1995 tour included the 1882 Whittier Elementary, the oldest continuously used school in the state. Members of the "Whittier Historians," an interest club for fourth graders, led tours of the school and also sold handmade crafts in a boutique. According to board member Kathryn Barth: "Two- to three-thousand people come on our tours each year, and they've all gone inside the schools, so we've built awareness of them in the community."

South Bend, Ind.

Rotarians in South Bend have come to the aid of two historic schools—the 1910 Lincoln Elementary and 1936 Marquette Elementary—by organizing community fix-up days during the summers of 1999 and 2000. Using donated equipment and materials, more than 700 volunteers have cleaned, painted, made repairs, and installed new playground equipment. The Rotarians now offer after-school programs and mentoring activities at the schools.

Utah

"Back to School" was the theme of the third annual photo contest sponsored by the Utah State Historical Society, *Utah Preservation* magazine, and a local film processing company (which donated photo services as prizes). The contest attracted 135 entries showing scenes of older school buildings in the state—from full exterior and sweeping interior

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shots to close-ups of architectural details. Winning photos were published in the magazine and exhibited by the Utah State Historical Society, and all entries became part of the Society's permanent photo collection.

What If the Building Can No Longer Be Used as a School? Options for Adaptive Use

As said before, not all older school buildings can be saved.

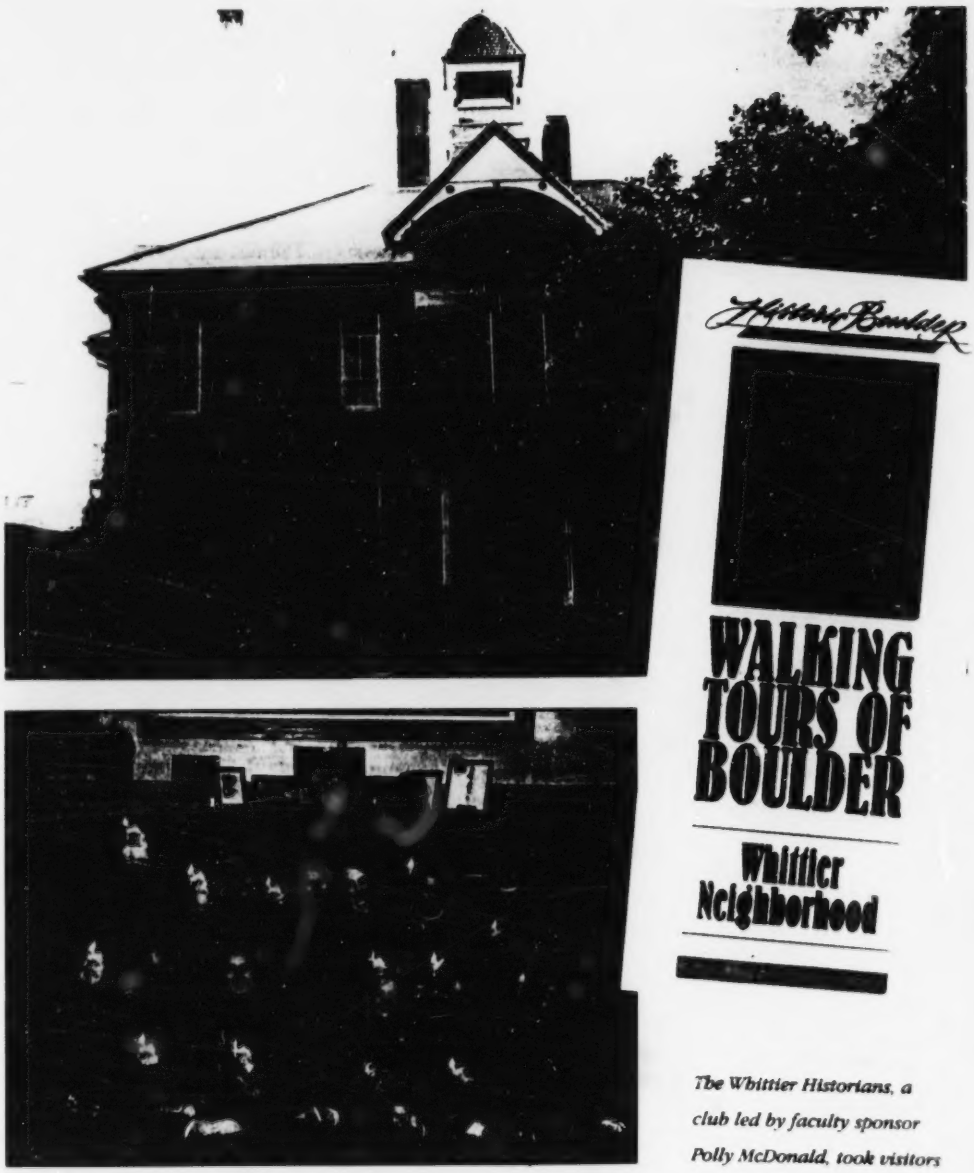
Sometimes the local population has shifted drastically since the school was built. There's not much reason to retain a "neighborhood" school if the school-age population of that neighborhood has declined significantly and is unlikely to rebound soon. Equally, a rapidly growing population will soon outgrow a small building and site offering no room to expand. Students may also be siphoned away from their neighborhood schools by consolidations, magnet schools, or competing private or charter schools.

And it is true, of course, that some of the other practical problems outlined earlier cannot be feasibly overcome.

But if the building is structurally sound and architecturally worthy, it can continue to serve its community well. Reuse options that are closely tied to the building's original use will require fewer alterations, thus keeping more of the historic fabric intact. Some possibilities include:

Educational uses: including charter schools, alternative schools, proprietary schools, colleges, or administrative offices.

Community centers: housing such activities as daycare and after school enrichment programs for children, family health clinics, job training programs, or day programs for seniors.



The Whittier Historians, a club led by faculty sponsor Polly McDonald, took visitors on tours of their school during a 1995 walking tour of the neighborhood sponsored by Historic Boulder.

— Photos courtesy of Polly McDonald

Other civic uses: such as conference centers, performing arts centers, libraries, offices for nonprofit organizations or government agencies.

Public or private housing, private offices, mixed-use commercial development.

For more information on adaptive use of school buildings, see:

Affordable Housing Through Historic Preservation: Tax Credits and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation, by Susan M. Escherich, Stephen J. Farneth, AIA, and Bruce D. Judd, FAIA, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resources, Preservation Assistance Division. Order from Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402-9325, (202) 512-1800.

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Historic Schools Reuse, by Jan Abell, FAIA, and Lee Braun, Florida Division of Historic Resources and Tampa Preservation, Inc., February 1997. Also includes information and case studies concerning continued use as schools. Available from the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation, (850) 224-8128.

For More Information

National Organizations

National Trust for Historic Preservation

The leader of the national preservation movement, the National Trust is committed to saving America's diverse historic environments and to preserving and revitalizing the livability of communities nationwide. The National Trust is a nonprofit organization, chartered by Congress in 1949, with more than 250,000 members. It acts as a clearinghouse of information on all aspects of preservation, assists in coordinating efforts of preservation groups, provides professional advice on preservation, conducts conferences and seminars, owns or operates 20 historic sites as museums, administers grant and loan programs, and issues a variety of publications. Six regional offices provide localized preservation advisory services and represent the National Trust in their regions. These are the best points of contact for learning more about the Trust and its programs. Addresses and phone numbers for the National Trust's national and regional offices are listed on the back of this publication. For more information, you can also visit the National Trust website: *www.nationaltrust.org*.

In June 2000 the National Trust named the country's historic neighborhood schools to the Trust's list of the 11 Most Endangered Historic Places. In response to this national problem, the National Trust is working with the National Park Service's National Center for Preservation Training and Technology, the Council of Educational Facility Planners International, and other organizations to put the renovation of historic schools on an equal footing with construction of new schools. Contact your National Trust regional office for more information.

American Institute of Architects
1735 New York Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 626-7300
www.e-architect.com

Committee on Architecture for Education
PIA (professional interest area) information line: (800) 242-3837 or (202) 626-7518
www.e-architect.com/pia/cae

The American Institute of Architects is the main national professional association for architects and allied professions. The Committee on Architecture for Education (one of the AIA's 22 professional interest areas) is a subgroup serving and connecting members concerned with the quality and design of educational, cultural, and recreational facilities. Its website includes relevant articles, reports, and conference presentations as well as information on related organizations (click on "Liaisons").

Council of Educational Facilities Planners, International (CEFPI)
9180 E. Desert Cove
Suite 104
Scottsdale, AZ 85260
(480) 391-0840
www.cefpi.com

This nonprofit membership organization has become the preeminent source of information on educational facilities planning. Members include planners, architects, educators, state regulators, engineers, and manufacturers and suppliers. It produces a monthly journal (*Educational Facilities Planner*), reports and other publications, conferences, and workshops. The website includes a publications list and journal abstracts, Consultant Directory, and reports on current issues.

Online Information Sources

American School & Universities
AS&U Online: *www.asumag.com*
www.SchoolDesigns.com

AS&U Online provides access to articles in *American School & University*, a magazine for business and facilities administrators in the nation's schools, colleges, and universities. Articles are indexed by topic, including "Construction/Renovation" and "Design/Planning." SchoolDesigns.com includes a database of hundreds of current construction and renovation projects, School News with details on specific projects, Directory of Design Professionals, and Construction Guide.

Education Week
www.edweek.org
Education Week, an online publication for educators, includes daily news as well as features and in-depth reports. "Facts and Figures by State" also provides links to in-state resources.

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Education Resource Organizations Directory
www.ed.gov\Programs\bastmp\SEA.htm
The Education Resource Organizations Directory lists addresses and websites for the education agencies in each state.

Mississippi State University Education Design Institute
www.edi.msstate.edu
This initiative between the College of Education and the School of Architecture at Mississippi State University is dedicated to the design of innovative learner-centered environments. EDI sponsors research, regional workshops, conferences, and publications. The website includes articles and conference presentations (especially see "Renovating Older Schools"), discussion forum, and links to related sites.

National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities
www.edfacilities.org/
Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, this website lists information resources on more than 40 "Hot Topics" in K-12 school planning, financing, design, construction, operations, and maintenance, with full text of some articles, bibliographies, and ordering information. Relevant topics include "Build or Modernize?" "Facilities Assessment," "Site Selection," and "Technology Integration."

United States Department of Education
www.ed.gov
An extensive "Topics from A to Z" index includes section on "Construction and Design of Schools." The site also describes the department's structure, current activities, and proposals.

State and Local Resources

State historic preservation officers/offices (SHPOs) are found in every state government, as authorized by Congress, to carry out federal historic preservation programs at the state level. The SHPO can be an excellent source of information on preservation activities and organizations throughout the state—including any activities related to school buildings. Some SHPOs have initiated statewide projects on this issue. To locate the state historic preservation officer of any state, contact:

National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers
444 North Capitol Street, N.W.
Suite 342
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 624-5465
www.sso.org/ncshpo

Statewide and local preservation organizations are private nonprofit organizations supported by membership dues, donations, fund-raising activities, and grants. Statewide organizations often work closely with SHPOs and also with local nonprofit preservation groups. Some are undertaking initiatives to protect older schools. They are also a good source of information, help, and support for others involved in this issue. For more information contact your National Trust regional office.

American Institute of Architects, State and Local Chapters
The AIA, described above, includes some 300 state and local chapters across the country, organized to serve the needs of architects and provide advice and assistance on architecture to individuals and groups. These are listed on its website at *www.e-architect.com/institute/chapters/chapter_search.asp.*

Parent-Teacher Association Chapters
The National PTA—a not-for-profit association of parents, educators, students, and other citizens—is the largest volunteer, child advocacy organization in the United States. The PTA has nearly 6.5 million members working in 26,000 local chapters in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and in Department of Defense schools overseas. Individual chapters, associated with specific schools, may be active in promoting facilities improvements at those schools. To find local chapters, contact your area schools, or:

National PTA
330 N. Wabash Ave.
Suite 2100
Chicago, IL 60611-3690
(303) 670-6783
www.pta.org

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"Continued Use of Historic Schools," Lisa Sheppard, unpublished manuscript, 1999.

"Forum on School Construction and Modernization," Council for Educational Facilities Planners, International, Phoenix, March 30, 1998. (On CEFPI website: www.cefpi.com/issue/1998schoolforum.html)

"Historic Schools for the 21st Century," moderator: Robert Nieweg; speakers: Sarah McCarthy, Edward Torrez, Larry Williams; National Preservation Conference, Washington, D.C., Oct. 21, 1999.

"Renovating Early and Middle 20th-Century Schools," Conference Report, Committee on Architecture for Education, American Institute of Architects, St. Louis, June 24-26, 1999. (On AIA website: www.e-architect.com/pia/cae/stlouis_r)

"Urban Schools: Lessons Learned for All Schools," Report, Committee on Architecture for Education, American Institute of Architects, Chicago, Sept. 24-26, 1998. (On AIA website: www.e-architect.com/pia/cae/urbsn_r)

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